Objective: The Economic Growth in Albania Project at the Center for International Development at Harvard University (Albania Project) would like to initiate and facilitate discussions between the Albanian Diaspora and government officials, private businesses, and nongovernmental organizations in the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo. The purpose of these discussions is to identify how the Albanian Diaspora can best contribute to economic development in the Balkans.

Our understanding is that Kosovo has created a capacity within the government that actively and successfully engages the diaspora in the country’s affairs. For instance, Kosovo even has a Ministry of Diaspora. At the same time, despite the comparable size of their Diasporas, the Diaspora relations have not gained the same attention and institutional support by the Government of Albania. Within the Albanian Government, the Diaspora issues are a mandate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Diaspora Unit within this ministry, if reinforced in terms of manpower and mandate, could serve as a body that strategizes and coordinates the Diaspora relations.

Our objective is therefore twofold: (1) to facilitate the building of the relations between the Albanian Diaspora Unit and relevant ministries on the one hand, and the Albanian communities abroad on the other; and (2) to support the Diaspora Unit in developing a strategy for engaging the diaspora in the country’s development.

Format: Our action plan involves three stages. First, together with the Massachusetts Albanian American Society and other Albanian community organizations, the Albania Project will organize a series of meetings in Boston, New York, Michigan, Toronto, and Washington DC. These meetings would be held during one week in March or April of 2015. Second, in June or September of 2015, a joint delegation of Harvard and Diaspora leaders will visit Tirana and work on establishing the foundations of a strategy for engaging the diaspora in the country’s development. The diaspora strategy should be the main outcome of the visit. The third stage involves implementation of this strategy.

Participants in the March/April Meetings: Leaders of the Albanian–American Diaspora, Albanian professionals, business leaders, and entrepreneurs would be invited to each of the meetings. Non-Diaspora participants would include 3-4 representatives of the Albania Project, 3-4 representatives from Albania, and 3-4 from Kosovo. It is recommended that the Ministers of Economy of both countries attend, along with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, leaders of each country’s Diaspora Initiatives, their Ambassadors to the USA, and at least one person from the private sector.
Plan of Action: The following calendar provides a road map for the next few months:

- January Distribute this draft widely throughout the Albanian Diaspora
- January Comments and discussion on the proposal, set dates for the March/April meetings, and begin planning the meetings
- February Design and complete an online survey to assess what people think in advance and set an agenda for the meetings in March/April
- March/April Hold meetings in Boston, New York, Michigan, Toronto, and Washington DC to clarify what steps can be taken in order to involve the Albanian Diaspora in Albania and Kosovo
- May/June Make preparations for delegation to visit Albania in June (or September if more time is needed to prepare)
- June/Sept Delegation visits Albania with objective of developing a better long-term vision and plan for involving the Albanian Diaspora in Albania and Kosovo
- July/October Finalize the draft strategy and begin the implementation stage.

Description of Meetings in March/April: The meetings in Boston, New York, Michigan, Toronto, and Washington DC will include short presentations of ideas about how the diaspora should engage with their home regions by Ministers of the Albanian government, the Albanian Delegation, the Kosovar Delegation, Harvard, and the Albanian-American Diaspora, followed by questions, answers and discussion. In order to establish a more systematic understanding of the diaspora’s opinions, we will administer an anonymous survey during the meeting.

Ideas for Consideration during and after the Meetings: A good diaspora strategy must be realistic and appealing both to the home organizations and to the diaspora itself. Hence, in the course of the meetings and before the drafting of the strategy, we would like to learn as much as possible about the ways in which the diaspora can feasibly engage with its home region. Here are some issues we would like to learn more about:

1. What are the ways in which the Albanian Diaspora would like to engage with Albania/Kosovo but currently cannot (e.g., is it because the Diaspora is not sure how to best do this, or because there is no easy way to connect, or because there are limited visible opportunities or perhaps a lack of trust/confidence in overseas counterparts)?

2. What types of engagements are the most attractive ones - professional exchange, tourism promotion, investment, cultural exchange, internships, and/or studies abroad? What are the perceived bottlenecks to undertaking any of these engagements?

3. With regard to professional exchange: (a) which professions are in demand in Albania, (b) is there a structured program for exchange, (c) are there sufficient working conditions, (d) what about the problems of payment, health insurance, social security while in Albania (transferability of rights), (e) what about working visas?

4. With regard to investments: (a) is there interest and willingness among the Albanian Diaspora to invest in Albania and Kosovo, (b) are there examples of successful and
unsuccessful attempts by the Diaspora, (c) what are the perceived political and economic risks, (d) what changes are needed in order to attract Diaspora investments?

5. How can we better engage the Albanian American Success Stories who recently led a delegation of 32 Albanian-American to Kosovo, the Albanian Professionals and Entrepreneurs Network, and other organizations to be involved in Diaspora Initiatives in Albania and Kosovo?

6. Should we prepare a list of Diaspora Initiatives that are underway in Albania, Kosovo, and elsewhere? http://www.kosovodiaspora.org/ and http://www.albanandisapora.org could be asked to help put together a database of initiatives (the latter is expected to be operating in early 2015);

7. How can we best design an online survey before the March/April meetings to address the issues identified above, in addition to other issues people will propose; and

8. Are there other important issues that we should consider, but have failed to mention?
Annex

In order to develop a successful Diaspora Program, it is imperative that the Government of Albania appoints a full-time coordinator to work with the Harvard team and the Albanian Diaspora. We would like to help strengthen the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with regard to its efforts to involve the Diaspora in Albania. We do think, however, that additional resources would likely be required to carry out the tasks defined below.

We recommend that:

The Prime Minister or the Minister of Foreign Affairs appoint a full-time Diaspora Ambassador/Program Coordinator to carry out the work program on behalf of the Government of Albania. The person selected should be relatively senior with broad international experience and already established contacts with the Albanian Diaspora.

The Diaspora Ambassador will work closely with different Ministries in Albania, the Albanian Diaspora communities, the Harvard Albania project and a number of other national and international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and private businesses. The Ambassador would coordinate the efforts aimed at developing and implementing a strategy that connects the interests of the diaspora with the ones of the Government of Albania.

More specifically, the responsibilities of the Diaspora Ambassador would include:

1. Liaise with all Ministries to ensure that they are aware of the Diaspora Program and become active participants in developing ways to collaborate;

2. Liaise with Harvard staff and the Open Society Foundation for Albania regarding the role of the Diaspora in the ongoing Harvard Albania Project;

3. Liaise with UNDP, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and others who have been engaged in Diaspora and Brain Gain related issues in the past;

4. Liaise with the Kosovo Ministry of Diaspora which was established in May 2011 to learn from their experience, exchange information, and develop joint activities;

5. Establish relations with the United States Embassy in Tirana (as well as other relevant embassies) to ascertain how they can be involved in the Diaspora initiative;

6. Establish relations with the Albanian American Development Foundation in Tirana in order to involve them in a Diaspora Program;

7. Liaise with the Albanian-American Diaspora, The Ministry of Diaspora in Kosovo, and others to being putting together a database/list of Diaspora organizations;

8. Liaise with the private sector and business organizations such as the American Chamber of Commerce in Albania to better engage the business sector; and
9. Review what has been done in other parts of world vis-à-vis Diaspora Initiatives.

10. Help develop, draft and implement an official strategy for involving the Diaspora in the country’s development.

Specific Tasks for which the Diaspora Ambassador/Program Coordinator would be responsible are:

1. Visiting Kosovo in January/February to establish relations with the Ministry of Diaspora and other organizations in Kosovo working on Diaspora related issues (e.g., kosovodiaspora.org)

2. Participating in the spring 2015 diaspora conference that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is co-organizing with the International Office of Migration in Tirana.

3. Discussing with the Albanian American Development Foundation ideas for using the AADF’s Lead Program as a model and encouraging LEAD to appoint one person to work in with the Diaspora Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

4. Discussing with Harvard University and the University of Michigan regarding their internship programs planned for Albania in 2015;

5. Reviewing findings and recommendations of programs aimed at the Albanian Diaspora the past two decades – e.g., Brain Gain Initiatives of UNDP and other organizations;

6. Visiting Greece, Italy, and other countries to learn more about how those Diasporas could contribute to Albania’s economic development;

7. Organizing a team of Albanian officials and business leaders to participate in the meetings planned for the USA and Canada in March/April of 2015;

8. Organizing conferences and meetings in Tirana on the role of the Diaspora in Albania together with international organizations, embassies, and business and educational institutions which have extensive ties with the Diaspora (e.g., the American Chamber of Commerce in Albania);

9. Taking care of all logistical and organizational requirements for the proposed Diaspora Delegation to Albania in June or September of 2015;

10. Regarding the visit of a Diaspora Delegation in 2015, learn from the experience of a very similar delegation which visited Kosovo in November 2014 (organized together by Albanian American Success Stories and the Embassies of Albania and the United States of America in Kosovo); and

11. Hiring additional junior staff in the future, as far as the resources allow, in order to assist the implementation of the tasks above.