



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT AN EVENT AT ROMANI BAXTI
COMMUNITY CENTRE ON THE INTERNATIONAL ROMA DAY**

9 April 2013

Dear Mr. Furtuna,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I was especially happy to be invited to come here and speak today, because I remembered last year's visit. I think it was in November. It was already cheerful, but I clearly have the impression, like my friends, that this is really topping it, and it is really fantastic to be here and to be able to speak to you on the occasion of the Roma Day or International Roma Week, it was rightfully said. It is not only about one day, it is a longer lasting work and we try to provide some basis. When I see the poster behind me, there is a basis – you see the symbol of ODIHR and you see, for example, the symbol of the European Union – joint work, supported by the participating States including the United States of America, contributing for your presence and also for your better future. I think it could not be better, because it is inclusion and it starts with you, it starts with this community centre and all the work you do here and also upstairs, because one of the things I remember from last year was really the kindergarten.

The work of ODIHR, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Field Operations, of which the Presence is a part, and the EU clearly cooperate closely on the Best Practices for Roma Integration project, which is indeed aimed at fostering the integration of Roma across the region. This Project is another example of the good international partnership.

A regional approach to deal with regional problems is the right one, in this and other areas where we share interests and face serious challenges. For a good reason, cooperation is part of the core values and therefore is part of the core activities of the Organization we, my collaborators and myself in the OSCE Presence, and in ODIHR proudly represent.

In this regard, the importance of protecting Roma culture and ensuring integration of Roma into our democratic societies is not only a constitutional requirement. All 57 OSCE participating States have assumed demanding politically-binding commitments in this area, such as the 2008 Helsinki Ministerial Council "Decision on enhancing OSCE Efforts to Implement the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area".

This is a topic of especially high relevance for my team and also for myself.

There is a long history of cooperation between the OSCE Presence and the Albanian authorities in improving the situation of Roma. For instance, the Presence contributed to the drafting of the National Strategy for the Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma.

We also assisted in drafting anti-discrimination legislation and supporting the establishment of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, including publication of anti-discrimination materials in minority languages.

Unfortunately, it is a sad fact that the Roma minority in Albania and, I will contend, in the whole region, suffers from systematic discrimination, lack of access to basic services and an overall failure to be fully represented in political life. Political inclusion and representation is crucial. It is not longer to be tolerated that Roma are not part of the public sphere of this country, nor of its decision-making processes.

This is why there is a need to take special and urgent measures to ensure full enjoyment of their rights, as any other Albanian citizens.

In this regard, protection from discrimination is not enough. I call upon all institutions to ensure that inclusion of Roma people and culture is incorporated in their policies and activities. And that Roma shall be included in their ranks, too.

For instance, I have often called for the inclusion of Roma and other minority groups in state structures, such as Police, and local institutions.

Moreover, Roma culture must be preserved and developed as an integral part of the Albanian National Cultural Heritage. The diversity of Roma culture, its language, music and art, is central in the rich heritage of Albania and throughout the Balkans. Roma artists should be supported.

And I think that proper research and documentation tools for studying the Roma culture could also be duly considered.

Dear Mr. Furtuna,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank *Romani Baxt*, and you personally, Mr. Gimi Furtuna, and to all the other co-organizers for reminding us not only of the richness of Roma cultural heritage, but also the importance of addressing vital issues facing the Roma community in their daily life.

Let us all have a joyful International Roma Day and week. Together with you, I now look forward to enjoy with you the musical and dancing performance that is waiting for us right after these speeches.

Thank you very much.

Ends