

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT A ROUNDTABLE OF *CIVIL FORUM 2010*

31 October 2012

President Moisiu,
President Meidani,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Coming to an activity of the Civil Forum 2010 is very meaningful for me. I am happy to join you again this morning.

Today we are to discuss a key topic for this country's stability and prosperity: crime in Albania.

All of us know that the transition to democracy in Albania brought dramatic changes in the national context, in a very short period of time. Unfortunately, this allowed crime to develop rapidly and establish ties to international organized crime, a serious security challenge.

The high rate of organized crime, or should I say the perceived high rate, lead to damage of the reputation of Albania, while the terrible unrest of 1997 allowed that a large number of weapons were falling into the hands of criminals.

Yet security sector reform took place slowly. Therefore it was difficult to fight crime more effectively. It required significant efforts of local authorities, law enforcement agencies and international partners to stabilize the situation and restore the State's capacity to fight crime.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that everybody in this room agrees that security is not an abstract issue. Some may not feel it when it is there, but they definitely feel it when there is a lack of security.

Security is linked to the legitimacy of modern democratic states: the basic right to security and the obligation of State institutions to guarantee it. Security is linked to human rights.

We are talking about both a constitutional principle and an emerging international consensus, reflected in several UN documents, obliging States to uphold every individual's freedom from fear.

Crime and the existence of criminal groups undermine State authority and the rule of law, negatively impacting on citizens' quality of life and corroding societies from inside.

There can be no free and open society without security, nor there can be development.

Some 20 years ago, during the communist period, Police were used as a tool of repression. For most citizens, co-operation with the Police was not an option. People felt insecure by Police, which should never be the case: in our democracies, including Albania, it is a body in service of the citizens.

Now, security sector reform is a long and complex process. If it is to be successful, it must also be comprehensive.

The improvement of capacities of law enforcement agencies is crucial, including training standards. The OSCE Presence in Albania has continuously supported efforts to that end, including assistance to the Albanian State Police in upholding high standards of professionalization.

And more needs to be done.

In this regard, corruption remains a big threat to the rule of law and democratic institutions in Albania. Impunity is unacceptable when the law is breached.

New laws on the State Police, the Anti-Mafia Law, and the recent introduction of the possibility of lifting of immunities of high officials are good examples of progress in this regard.

But this must be accompanied by a convincing track record of verdicts and robust, appropriate sentencing or fines in all corruption cases.

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President Meidani,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given that this circle is indeed a real Civil Forum, I would like to underline that all actors, authorities and citizens alike, have a shared interest in the fight against crime.

Law enforcement agencies must work together with citizens and communities to prevent all forms of crime. Policy tools such as community policing have proved so useful in preventing crime and enhancing public trust towards Police. Such initiatives should be taken forward.

Let me commend you for this high level discussion, which is about to develop.

Thank you.

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