



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

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT A CONFERENCE ON ENHANCING CO-OPERATION
BETWEEN THE PROBATION SERVICE AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

13 November 2012

Minister Halimi,
Minister Noka,
Director General Sefgjini,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

On behalf of the OSCE Presence in Albania, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this conference, organized with the Albanian Probation Service of the Ministry of Justice.

This event builds on our strong partnership with the Ministry of Justice, aimed at jointly tackling key issues of justice reform.

The presence of the Justice Minister and the Interior Minister here is an indicator of the importance of the Presence's co-operation with the Albanian authorities in this process, especially in the context of the 100th anniversary of Albania's independence.

The OSCE Presence's mandate includes support to justice reform as an important element. It is also at the core of Albania's reform efforts and its European path. Some of the numerous reforms steps covered completely new ground for Albania at the moment they were done.

Probation and the Probation Service are among these outstanding, groundbreaking steps.

For enhancing the co-operation in the probation system, we are meeting here today. The aim of probation is to contribute to better criminal justice as well as public safety by preventing and reducing the occurrence of offences, while allowing former offenders to come to senses and return quickly to society as useful members of this society. I will come back on this shortly.

The international instruments to which Albania has subscribed recommend an increased use of alternatives to imprisonment, in order to reduce the problem of prison overcrowding and counter social exclusion together with the overall negative effects of unnecessary imprisonment.

The Albanian Probation Service represents a major step forward in reforming the criminal justice system, along the lines required by international rules and OSCE standards.

The Presence has been actively involved in supporting the Ministry of Justice in the establishment three years ago of the Probation Service and in contributing to its effectiveness, assisting through capacity-building activities for probation officers and training for judges, prosecutors, and local officials. Groundbreaking times, as I just highlighted.

Although probation is a relatively new institution, it has already accomplished much in a short period of time. A large part of this success story so far is to be attributed the Probation Service's professional staff, who I would like to commend for their dedicated and certainly demanding work.

The implementation of alternatives to imprisonment requires the co-operation of all justice actors. This includes active involvement of local governments and civil society, the subject of this meeting today.

Inter-agency co-operation is crucial in the success of probation efforts. It should be a policy priority.

This has been the objective of the different training sessions which the Presence, jointly with the Probation Service, organized in the last two years, for instance, for social workers from Tirana, Korça, Burrel or Gjirokastra, and roundtables for NGOs.

I am glad to see here today many Mayors and other representatives of local government units. You, as elected representatives, have key responsibilities in this process.

In this regard, I am pleased to hear that the Probation Service has already signed 228 Memoranda of Understanding with local government units, aimed at the alternative sentences to be served locally, so that the offender is close to his or her residence.

The goal is to advance the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into society, beginning with their communities of residence. Probation is in fact an opportunity for offenders to reintegrate in society and it makes much sense that this takes place in the local community.

The social inclusion of offenders through community sanctions and measures is a step forward in guaranteeing communities' safety. It is a step forward in crime prevention.

Given the presence of the Interior Minister, I would like to stress the crucial role that the police, especially the police at the local level, has in the implementation of alternative sentences.

Supervision should not be seen purely as a control measure, but rather as a means of advising, assisting and motivating offenders. Supervision shall aim to meet the offenders' needs for a smooth transition back into society, such as employment, housing and education. It should also ensure compliance with court conditions, to reduce the risks of reoffending and to help individuals become law-abiding citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It clearly needs skills, experience and dedication to find the right balance between punishment and treatment, and the offender's rehabilitation and reintegration into society. These are real challenges, sometimes for obvious reasons contradicting, or rather opposing valid arguments for one or other solution.

But be assured, all justice systems that are worth the name, starting with the justice systems in democracies, face these questions and need to come to broadly agreed solutions after constructive discussions.

At bottom, this is both about guaranteeing community safety and about giving offenders, in a human rights-based society, a chance for rehabilitation of the individual. Through a rehabilitated individual the chances grow for strengthening society.

A fully functioning probation service is also a tangible contribution to strengthening the rule of law, an essential objective for this country's progress.

The OSCE Presence will continue to support the Ministry of Justice in its good work for the country and especially in implementing reforms of Albania's criminal justice sector.

Let me wish you a very successful and productive conference.

Thank you.

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