



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

**Press Conference**  
**Ambassador Pavel Vacek, Head of Presence**  
**5 November 2004**

Mirëdita, ladies and gentlemen.

I welcome you all. I am glad to meet a very representative sample of the Albanian media scene which is very dynamic and assertive as I have already learnt. I have owed you this opportunity for quite some time; the timing of this conference was driven by the need for me to complete the initial round of calls on the constitutional representatives. The one month that elapsed since my arrival allows for a better interaction with you.

I am also pleased to introduce to you a new face among the Presence's senior staff, Mr. Wolfgang Sporrer of Austria, the Head of our Democratisation Department.

Firstly, I am very happy to be in Albania as the Head of OSCE Presence and look forward to working and living here for some time to come. I am also very impressed by the Albanian reality – its dynamic nature but also its contrasts. I understand that the country has gone a long way from the chaos of 1997. The new buildings, shops and growing foreign investments are a token of renewal and recovery. Public security has improved. There is strong awareness of strategic objectives of the country. The Albanian aspirations vis-à-vis European Union and NATO are known, reckoned with and supported by all principal international partners.

However, some of the reasons for which the OSCE came into the country are still present. In late 2003, the mandate of the OSCE Presence was amended to reflect the improved situation and better focus the work. The OSCE's goal in Albania continues to be to promote democratization, the rule of law and human rights as well as to consolidate democratic institutions, in conformity with the OSCE principles, standards and commitments.

A number of areas where we are mandated to provide assistance and expertise to authorities and civil society stem from our overarching goal: we support legislative, judicial, property and regional administrative reform; we assist with electoral reform – one of the most important tasks in view of the 2005 elections. We help build-up capacities of the Assembly. We are supporting Albanian efforts in anti-trafficking and anti-corruption, we provide police assistance, in particular to the border police. We help develop effective media laws and regulations. We help promote good governance and strengthen civil society. In doing all of this, we closely co-operate with other international organizations.

I would like to emphasise that amending the electoral legislation and preparing well the next year's parliamentary elections is the priority. Albania has to depart from the past practice of contested elections that fell short of international standards. The

importance of the next year's elections for the country and its ambitions cannot be overstated. The OSCE is doing its best: the ODIHR has produced recommendations on the electoral legislation, the Presence is actively supporting the process. Together with the EU, we will massively assist the voter registration process. However, the process leading up to the elections is painfully slow and not resultative enough. The Parliament has to resolve the outstanding issues in reviewing and amending the provisions on voting procedures on election day, electoral zones, allocation of proportional mandates and some other issues. We hope that the calendar of election preparations will be observed. That is contingent on the political will of the legislators and the capacity of the administration both on central and local levels. Failure to have free and fair elections in 2005 would be a serious setback not only for the country's external aspirations but for the Albanian democracy itself. The responsibility for the preparation and conduct of the elections rests with the Albanian political representation and administration, while the election's outcome must be in the hands of the Albanian people.

We also consider it a priority to continue to assist in implementing the legislation on restitution and compensation of property. A lot of things that we do are not visible, but that does not diminish their importance. We provide for facilitation and consensus building, we assist in drafting sub/statutory acts and instructions, we increase the capacity of State authorities involved, we provide for foreign and domestic expertise.

We will continue to provide support to the Albanian Police both in training and also in cross-border co-operation. We continue doing so in co-operation with others, primarily with PAMECA. When possible, we will mobilize limited resources to provide material assistance. The donation of radio equipment to the Albanian Police is one such example.

In the immediate future, please do not expect dramatic changes in terms of what we do. There is a continuity of the mandate, of the work to be done and of the people in the Presence, both international and national experts. I am impressed by the expertise and determination of our OSCE staff. The number of national Albanian staff of the Presence is increasing while the number of international staffers is decreasing and the trend will continue. We will have to continue operating nation-wide, at least as far as the major programmes are concerned, for example: electoral support, rule of law, assistance to local government and police, support to civil society. For that purpose, the role of our Field Stations is essential and it will continue to be the case for some time to come.

On the other hand, there is a room for change in terms of how we do our work. Here I emphasise that we are determined to consult more closely with the Albanian authorities on all levels on the content of our work, namely on the programmes and projects. I have invited some of my counterparts – the ministers at the services for which we are relevant – to come up with lists of concrete suggestions on where our support is most needed. We have pledged to undertake a consultation with the Government (MFA) before the end of this year to possibly better adjust our planned activities to the requirements of the host country. This is consistent with the intention of mine, as the new Head of Presence, to make our work more demand-driven. At the same time, we are confident that what we have done so far has been based on

requirements from Albanian partners, be it the authorities or the non-governmental sphere.

Our consultation with the host country is the key to our common success in terms of having both the Albanian demand and support for what we do. However, more generally, we are also guided by the OSCE *acquis*, our mandate and the collective political will of the 55 OSCE participating States. These will also determine for how long we are to continue working in and with Albania. I emphasise that we are here because the 55 participating States, including Albania, have wanted us to be here and we will assist for as long as we are needed and wanted. We will do so in consultation with our international partners, primarily with the other international organizations present in Albania.

Faleminderit!

### **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

**Q: Mr. Ambassador, you mentioned earlier that the electoral process is painfully slow. You have had meetings with the political forces in the country for one month now. What is your opinion? Do you think that they will manage to fulfil their task in time and what has been your communication with them? What messages have you conveyed to them?**

**Ambassador Vacek:** “I consider it a realistic objective and I would very much like to believe that the necessary political will is there, but certainly the process of amending the electoral legislation has to be sped up. We have provided our support to the process through the Technical Expert Group and the technical body has worked closely and supported the respective parliamentary body. The basis for the work has been provided through the recommendations by the respective OSCE institution, that is the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The rest is in the hands of the political representation of the country.”

**Q: The Expert Group has provided the ad hoc parliamentary committee with a series of proposals, but none of them has caused any reaction except for the last one, which was on the composition of the Zone Election Commissions, according to which the composition of such commissions should be made based on the results of the 2003 elections. Do you think that the CEC decision from 2001 listing the opposition political parties should not be taken into consideration, and why?**

**Ambassador Vacek:** “It is certainly up to the respective parliamentary bodies to deliberate and ultimately decide on this and this should reflect not only the will of the actors involved, but also the ratio of the forces in the parliament, and this is something that the OSCE as such has to respect for as long as it is consistent with the recommendations made by the ODIHR.”

### **KOHA TELEVISION**

**Q: Mr. Ambassador, as you already mentioned, the issue of the electoral zones is not yet solved and it is even contested by the opposition. Will the OSCE Presence intervene towards the solution of such an issue before it becomes a law, and will the OSCE guarantee the strict respect for the law?**

**Ambassador Vacek:** “Thank you for this question. There has already been an input made in the Technical Expert Group to the ad hoc committee on electoral zones and, if I am not wrong, this was already done in the early autumn of this year. Again, that is a matter for the political debate and deliberations in parliament. And certainly it has been our expectation and hope that the outcome will be well consistent with whatever are the standards or recommendations. In terms of guaranteeing the outcome of whatever electoral processing, here I should tell you that the OSCE as such is not a guarantor of the correctness of whatever is done in that regard in whichever participating state. We certainly do assist and monitor such processes, but the ultimate guarantor are Albania’s own constitutional institutions.”

#### **ALBANIAN TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY**

**Q: Before asking you a question, let me please express my appreciation for the work and objectivity of the organization you lead. You mentioned earlier that the next elections are very important and the conduct of free and fair elections is very important for the integration of the country into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Could you share with us your preliminary opinion about elections in case they are contested, bearing in mind that even the strongest democracies sometimes do have problems with elections. And a sub-question: have you already found a good spirit of co-operation with the Albanian authorities during your time in Albania?**

**Ambassador Vacek:** “I thank you very much, firstly for the kind words of appreciation for our work. Secondly, let me deal with the first question. Actually, everything what we have done and what we will continue doing aims at not having contested elections. There are provisions on contesting individual aspects of the electoral process in the electoral legislation of Albania, so there is certainly legitimate basis for a legitimate process, but the overall objective of ours is to avoid contestation. Whether that will be done or not, is in the hands of the political actors of the Albanian scene. If I should make an appeal here that will be an appeal for responsibility.

On the second question, indeed, I can confirm that hitherto I have met with a forthcoming attitude on the part of the authorities, more particularly on the part of the constitutional office holders and representatives whom I have met hitherto.

I can speak of a spirit of co-operation which I have detected in all the contacts I have had, and that for me is a good start indeed. I certainly do very much believe that this will remain the case.”

#### **ALSAT RADIO AND TELEVISION**

**Q: The first question is what is your opinion on the corruption of the Albanian administration? There is a report of Transparency International, which ranks**

**Albania after Uganda. The second question is what is your opinion about the lifting of the immunity of the Member of Parliament Nikollë Lesi?**

**Ambassador Vacek:** “About the first question, honestly I will not pass judgements on their survey which is widely known and widely commented here. That is certainly a piece of information which is worth reflecting. That is the case in all countries which are concerned and the OSCE Presence here does not pass judgements of this sort. That report is perhaps, to a degree, symptomatic for the general state of affairs, at least to the degree to which we attribute importance to the reports and surveys by that particular organization, i.e. Transparency International. That is probably all I can say on that.

On the other question, I can tell you that I am not terribly familiar with the parameters of the case. I am aware of it basically from the media and at this stage I will not make comments on it. At the same time, I would very much believe that the case will be treated with respect for the Albanian legislation. That is more or less what I can tell you about it, as long as I do not know more and as long as I am not entirely familiar with the details.”

**VIZION PLUS TELEVISION**

**Q: The work of your predecessor Mr. Lipponen was often opposed especially by the left wing parties, which have even asked for the departure of him personally and the OSCE Presence. Even the Socialist Party itself has considered the work of the OSCE experts as insufficient and therefore asked for the ODIHR experts. Mr. Lipponen was even accused of being biased towards the opposition. What is your strategy? What are you going to do? Are you going to try and build a balance with the majority in general and the Socialist Party in particular?**

**Ambassador Vacek:** “Thank you for this difficult question. They are several questions at a time, but let me take some of the elements one after the other. Firstly, it is my policy not to comment on my predecessors, but what I can comment on my predecessor on a personal basis is that I have come to know him as a very seasoned, experienced and nice man. In terms of what I will be doing here, it will be based on the continuity of the work he has left behind. I am not aware in detail of whatever accusations or recommendations there may have been with respect to my predecessor. I certainly am determined to work impartially with all willing political partners with respect to the electoral reform, because that is, I think, the area which we are talking about now. I would very much believe that this has already been demonstrated in some of the concrete things that we have done in that regard. And it has also been demonstrated that on the work on the electoral issues we will work jointly with the ODIHR, and I think that there is a concrete testimony to this, and that was the breakthrough on the electoral issue of restructuring the Central Election Commission. That is perhaps one other thing which I would say here: while working with all willing partners, we at the same time have to respect the ratio of forces in Parliament, and it is the ratio of the forces which determines, in most cases, the outcome of the deliberations of Parliament. And, in a way, this is the case in every democracy.

Check against delivery

It has been my pleasure and it will continue to be my pleasure to meet you more often and more regularly, either collectively or individually. Thank you for finding time and sharing time with me. Faleminderit. Thank you very much.”