

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT A MEETING WITH STUDENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN TIRANA**

6 February 2017

The road that leads to progress and a better future is a hard one, but it's worth it.

The OSCE is committed to assist Albania in reaching the highest democratic standards in order to fulfil its OSCE Commitments. Democracy, Rule of Law and Human rights are pillars of functional modern societies. In Albania, functional democratic governance is still hindered by lack of dialogue at the highest political level, politicization of the public administration, slow justice administration, widespread corruption and organized crime. These problems cannot be solved in one day or one year, but with everyone's commitment I am certain Albania can succeed.

I came to Albania for the first time in 1996, when many of you were still kids: to a country which was incredible poor, disorganized, partly even anarchic, controlled by violence in some regions and with many heavy defaults in its nascent democracy. I was landing at an old pre-war airport, driving over bumpy roads between bunkers and cows to a town full of shanty constructions and with little light.

Today Albania has advanced in a way I could have never imagined in 1996, but still Albania has a long way to go. The OSCE Presence in Albania concentrates its support for Albania on a number of fields where we believe that we can make a difference, and where others are not yet supporting Albania. To put some "meat on these bones", I will give you a couple of examples concerning our activities.

This year, the OSCE Chairmanship has set Youth as one of our highest priorities. Young people like you hold the key for the direction which Albania and other countries in the region will take. Young people's participation in public life and social media, prevention of radicalization of young people and regional youth co-operation are some fields of activity, just to name a few.

With the orientation of our Austrian Chairmanship, the OSCE Presence in Albania has also focused more on working with young people, and has, for instance, recently developed in co-operation with the Municipality of Tirana and the Austrian Embassy a new project: *The Youth Trail* as we call it. This project will bring together discussions on youth, radicalization, peace and security, combined with outdoor activities. Participants will come from all over the Western Balkans.

We also work with young people in towns and villages across the country. These activities provide a unique opportunity to connect young people, decision-makers and public figures, to discuss democracy and plan local initiatives.

Finally, we will seek to establish a Youth Advisory Group for ourselves to better serve young Albanian people through our programmatic work.

There are other challenges. Elections are coming, and they are the first step for a better future. You will make your choice. You might be tempted not to show up, you might be tempted to sell your vote, to take photographs of ballot sheet to prove that you voted for the 'right' people. You choose the democracy you want to live in, so please make the right choice. We support Albania with the reform of the electoral law, give our advice on best practises. Our colleagues from the OSCE/ODIHR will come to monitor the elections, but finally it is up to you Albanians to decide in which way you want to vote.

Human Rights in Albania are mostly respected but efforts are still necessary in areas such as child rights protection, gender-based violence, property restitution/compensation. We are for many years already involved in the fight against trafficking of human beings - often linked to the most serious human rights violations. We work with prisons and probation service on improving also this sector of the Albanian judicial system.

Albania has been gone through dramatic changes in the last 25 years, and one of the most dangerous ones has been the further spread of cannabis in the country. Cannabis damages society and the future generations. We all have to make the right choices, but especially young people: Do I work in illegal plantations? Do I use cannabis? Do I even sell it?

The OSCE Presence in Albania will support the government in its endeavour to implement a comprehensive plan to fight cannabis.

Another activity of the OSCE Presence, that took place in this room, is about dealing with the past. Dealing with the past might seem for the younger generations, eager for the future, like a waste of time, but I am fully convinced it is not. Ensuring mistakes are not repeated is also ensuring a better future. I am from Germany, a country which had to deal with its past twice during the last century: after the Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War, and after the Communist dictatorship. I am old enough a have seen different approaches in my country on the past. Many years dominated by a maze of silence after the Second World War, but leading to an active citizen society dealing with the past. For my country this was - with all the imperfections of the process - a liberating process to develop a new narrative about the past. We feel that in Albania many have a need to enter into a discussion about what happened between 1944 and 1990. We are eager to support this process - based on the large amount of experience of many of our participating States.

Fighting corruption, helping to destroy the dangerous leftovers of Enver Hoxha's armament frenzy, improving the links between citizens and parliament, and a number of more projects are ongoing.

But I was also asked to speak about contemporary challenges for culture and arts.

I believe that Albania is in this field confronted with similar challenges as other countries. Where are we concerning contemporary challenges to art and culture in Albania and in Europe?

Major changes are taking place in the world: look at refugees and their suffering, mass migration, terror threats everywhere, perceived or real threats to economic wellbeing in the developed economies of the EU, shifts in the distribution of wealth, and many more.

How is this reflected in art? I am fully aware that art needs time to reflect developments like the ones mentioned. Art has to penetrate, has to have depth.

It can take a long time until art properly reflects major changes, until these changes find their way into art: the I and the II World War, the paradigm change of 1989/90 needed time to penetrate into art, to be reflected by art on a broader scale.

Since 9/11 we are now faced with the thread of violent extremism and terrorism on a global scale, and also in Albania.

Since 1990 Albania and many other countries – and the artists in these countries - are challenged by the paradigm change of the end of Communist dictatorships and the dealing with this past.

Politics are dealing with that, sometime in an extremely controversial way, but is art doing that? Art has to be one of the instruments to dissect political and societal developments also in this context as a way of penetrating the world.

We would like to encourage that. The OSCE supports in Albania a national dialogue on Dealing with the Past, encompassing theatre plays, like here in *Black Box*, movie presentations and discussions. We are also ready to support the work on text books and on curricula. But we also hope that Albanian artists will in their work reflect more on this topic, and also on the topic of religious radicalization leading to violence.

I am very much aware that this is a challenge and contains risks. Walter Benjamin once wrote about the risk when art gets in politics. He mentioned the aesthetization of politics in Fascism and the politization of aesthetics in Communism.

More risks for art have developed since then: the risk of fraternization with money instead of thematisation of developments, the replacement of the game with markets through art by the deal with markets by artists – where the somehow pretty and pleasant gains ground.

But there is more. I may mention two: the risk of political correctness, while art should provide or can provide the alternative draft. Or the flat politization, where political labelling replaces the question of relevance of art about the place of national art between tradition and present discourse. To sum up: the risk of a platitudinous approach replacing depth and aesthetics.

A recent example, much debated in my country, was last year's staging of Parsifal in Bayreuth, set into an artificial Iraq/refugee scenery – a platitudinous insult for a composer whose complex compositions certainly do not need artificial actualization.

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Looking at the enormous challenges Europe and also your country is confronted with, we want encourage young artists to work on some of these challenges, of course without falling into the traps that art is confronted with. We encourage you to work on the two themes and challenges I mentioned: Albania's dealing with the past, and Albania's confrontation with violent extremism.

We support, together with the University of Arts and the Faculty of Fine Arts, a competition of artists on these themes – the best works being selected by a panel of experts, the 2 winners receiving each a prize of 500 Euro. All the best art works – paintings, installations or sculptural works - will be exhibited at FAB gallery for the national and international audience in Tirana.

I hope I can motivate you to participate. I wish all participants luck in this contest. I am grateful for the support of the lecturers and the professors in this contest, and I am of course extremely curious about the results.