



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

P r e s e n c e i n A l b a n i a

**Opening Intervention by Ambassador Pavel Vacek,
Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania**

at the

**Assembly Roundtable on Changes to the Rules of Procedure
25 October 2004**

Good morning Your Excellency, Mr Speaker, Honourable Deputies, Distinguished Colleagues, ladies and Gentlemen,

It would be quite daring from me, as a newcomer, to speak about such delicate and complex issues like the reform of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure if there were not for the accumulated expertise, know-how and determination of my collaborators within the OSCE Presence which have helped this revision of the Rules materialise.

The Albanian Assembly has been a rapidly developing institution over the past several years and has the ambition to become a real forum of political debate, political exchange, policymaking and, most importantly, legislating. Through its Committees of Inquiry and ad hoc committees on a number of important issues, the Assembly has become the key institution in seeking political consensus on the major institutional reforms ongoing in the country.

The last revision of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure occurred in 1998 and it is therefore timely that after the experience of two legislatures, the Rules are now being updated to reflect the needs of a more mature institution.

The OSCE Presence would like to recognise the leadership of the Speaker and the other members of the Rules of Procedure Working Group who have taken on the task to review every article of the existing Rules and drafting detailed amendments.

A significant amount of work has been accomplished over the past six months in the weekly meetings of the Working Group and, when taken together with the earlier preparatory work done well over a year ago, it must be said that the work has been exhaustive.

The OSCE Presence is privileged to have been invited by the Assembly to support its work in this direction and has devoted considerable time and efforts to it.

The work presented here today represents a multi-party effort to increase the transparency of the Assembly, clarify its procedures, and strengthen the democratic principles upon which it stands.

Numerous European parliamentary systems have been studied: the French and Italian traditions, the Nordic experiences, the Spanish and Portuguese, Dutch and German, and also the parliamentary systems of other countries in transition such as Poland, Romania and Slovenia.

The rules do not represent simply a mixture of rules for these various countries, but their examples have been used as carefully considered solutions as means to answer the various challenges faced by today's Albanian Assembly.

The OSCE Presence, through its support project, has been able to arrange the services of a consultant for the Assembly from an expert in rules of procedure from the European Parliament. He has worked with the Legal Department of the Assembly with comment and analysis of the proposals put forth.

The proposed amendments that have been distributed for your review take into account many of the issues of concern the Presence has raised about the Assembly's functioning gathered over the past several years of its close relationship with the institution.

The Presence has raised concern over the need to clarify more precisely the roles of the Speaker and Secretary General, the way parliamentary groups are formed, the need to establish a single lead committee to review a given piece of legislation, the need for timely distribution of minutes of proceedings and transcripts of plenary sittings, the need to maintain order and decorum, and the need to enhance oversight over the government.

Two important changes the Presence has also been advocating are the following:

1) the establishment of a single standing Committee on European Integration, as a sign of multi-party commitment to the integration process and a means to guarantee greater parliamentary involvement in the European issues as has been the experience in EU states;

2) the establishment of the Assembly's budgetary independence from the government. This will ensure the Assembly has the resources its needs and the necessary autonomy in deciding over their use. We know we cannot be too prescriptive here since these principles are not firmly based on a concrete norm. However, they are based on best practices of parliaments in EU countries and elsewhere.

The harmonious way the members of the Working Group collaborated on these proposed amendments is to be commended. Today's roundtable is also a sign of the increased transparency that is being sought for how the Assembly operates.

I expect that today's presentation of the Working Group's amendments—the first time they are being presented outside the group—will stimulate a constructive debate. Recognizing that former Speakers with a wealth of experience have also been invited to today's event, we are eager to hear the views you have on how the Assembly functions and your evaluation of the proposed changes.

The OSCE Presence will continue to work together with the Assembly, in the same spirit of partnership, to support the implementation of the new Rules once they are adopted and then go into effect in the next legislature. The Presence is currently working to support a number of reform projects to enhance the quality of the services provided by the Assembly's administration and the revision of the Rules is a key part of this.

Finally, let me emphasise that it is not by coincidence or out of mere symbolism that I am addressing you here today together with the Head of EC Delegation and the Ambassador of the EU Presidency. The presence and involvement of both of our institutions is a token of co-operation and synergy we have had and will continue to have in assisting the Albanian Assembly.