

**REMARKS BY THE HEAD OF PRESENCE AT SIXTH CONFERENCE OF THE
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES OF STATES
PARTICIPATING IN THE SEE STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION PROCESS**

Tirana, 9 March 2012

Madam Speaker,
Chairman Bushati,
Members of Parliament
Ambassador Sequi,
Honoured Guests,
Good morning.

I am very pleased to be with you today to discuss together a subject that is key to development of freedom, democracy and prosperity of the region – European integration.

And, as the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, you will not be surprised to hear when I say that we stand fully behind the efforts of Albania as it moves along the European integration process. So do my colleagues in OSCE missions in the region.

Madame Speaker has just highlighted that integration is a National Priority for Tirana.

The Presence works very closely with the EU Delegation and with the Council of Europe in assisting Albania to implementing some of key strategic projects to address a number of the EU key priorities.

Clearly, the role played by national parliaments in driving forward the integration agenda is critical.

I commend all of you present for joining your efforts with those of your respective Governments and Parliaments in pushing through the reform agenda in your countries.

I think the key word to stress here is ‘partnership’ and ‘solidarity’.

The ability for those with often widely differing political views to come together, to forge political agreements on key strategic issues in the national interest is absolutely essential if the integration is to succeed

A simple review of the histories of all countries of the region will show that in those cases where such partnerships have not been possible success of the integration agenda has been limited.

As a matter of fact, partnership is needed not only in the passing of legislation but also in ensuring that the words agreed in parliament are implemented ‘on the ground’ and effect the lives of ordinary working people.

Smart pieces of legislative paper will not deliver change, full implementation will.

That is why the responsibilities that lie on your political shoulders are so great.

Also, that is why I believe today’s conference provides an excellent opportunity for the sharing of experiences and ideas in order to avoid any ‘reinventing of the wheel’.

For the OSCE Presence, our focus is on Albania and so I will briefly ‘flag up’ a few challenges that Governments of all political hues in this country have had to face.

First, let me mention the issue of justice and legal reform.

Given that a functioning judicial system, as well as trust in this system, are key elements for a democratic State upholding the rule of law, justice reform in line with European standards is crucial for all the countries of the region.

In this regard, it has been impressive to see the clear orientation of both the Government and Parliament towards European legislation and European standards.

To further strengthen the process, we would encourage all relevant national institutions to take the underlying European values as a framework and adapting them judiciously. Again, effective implementation of reformed legislation is key.

Second, I would like to briefly address the issue of electoral reform – an area that lies at the very core of what the OSCE does and a topic that I am sure is well known to most if not all you present here.

I am grateful that Madame Speaker touched on this topic in her introduction. An electoral reform in any country constitutes one of the most crucial reforms for furthering democratic development - on this we can all agree.

It is a complex process that requires comprehensive discussions at a political and technical level.

That is why I am pleased to note that the reform is ongoing in the Albanian parliament.

I use this moment to strongly encourage all stakeholders to build on the current positive practice.

Again, I return to the fact that the existence and continuance a political will and mutual trust among national actors is vital for the reform to be finalized in an exhaustive and timely manner.

It is also important that any reform is of a high quality and is nationally owned.

Finally, can I raise the issue of property reform - a topic I would suggest that has proven to be problematic for most, if not all, countries in this region.

It is certainly an issue we are familiar with as it forms part of our mandate.

Currently, conflicting legislation and a continued lack of harmonization has made property reform more complicated, prevented effective implementation of laws and legally-binding decisions, and delayed legal processes further resulting diminution of legal certainty.

The Albanian Government should be commended for releasing its draft property reform Strategy.

We hope that the Strategy establishes policies to enable first registration to take place with the legal status of properties ascertained.

Madam Speaker,
Honoured Guests,

In my view any European Integration process will only ever truly succeed when the respective citizens of each country support the process.

And they can only be expected to support a process when national Governments and parliaments explain what the process is about and why it is good for them.

I should also say that involving civil society and relevant think tanks can only help further in effectively explaining to ordinary people what this issue is all about.

In summing up, I believe key words here for future success are partnership, national solidarity and communication.

Can I finally wish all those present a very productive conference - given the very distinguished people we see gathering here today I would think this would almost be inevitable.

Thank you very much.

Ends