



**HEAD OF OSCE PRESENCE OPEN LECTURE AT THE
“ALEXANDER XHUVANI” UNIVERSITY**

Elbasan, 17 April 2012

Dear Professor Varoshi,
Dear Mayor,
Dear students and professors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

First of all, I would like to thank you, Professor Varoshi, for giving me as head of the OSCE Presence in Albania the opportunity to speak in the University “Alexander Xhuvani” a University of greatest traditions in Albania, in front of this distinguished audience. Coming to Elbasan in the heart of the country is always very special for me.

I am honoured to be invited to deliver from this platform views on a range of important subjects. I intend to speak on issues like democracy, active citizenship, minority rights, elections, and social peace. All are very relevant for our day to day life, in every country of the world, and beyond that they are also most relevant for progress regarding Albania's political aspirations.

To speak in front of a young generation, strongly represented here today, makes this honour even more special for me. The young will be at the centre of my discussion – and those young in heart will hopefully be with me.

Dear Rector Varoshi,
Dear students and professors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The young by nature have in them the energy for transformation. History also tells that the young have to carry the burden of social transformations.

Experience tells that youth, education and freedom are no natural coincidence, coming by surprise, or as a combination just happening without prior constructive engagement.

Youth comes naturally, education not. Books stand not only symbolically for education. At this point, I want to cite Franz Kafka, who once said that "a book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us". My understanding of Kafka is that cognition comes through education – leading to progress. Leading to freedom, preserving freedom. And, it was the energy for change ingrained in the hearts of those students in the 1990s that made Albania join the family of free nations. They showed to the world that freedom is universal and that reason always defeats repression.

After the fall of communism, democracy as a concept was given a renewed consideration across the world.

The emerging economic and political multi-polarity, expansion of markets, reorganization of labour force, or even disintegration of states: all put democracy again under the sharp lenses of time for a re-evaluation.

In response not only to the rapid changes taking place in the post-communist Central and South Eastern Europe but, moreover, to direct such transformations to a peaceful and prosperous future the largest ever regional security organization, the OSCE, was founded in 1994 following the Budapest Conference. It was built on the foundations laid by the Conference on the Security and Co-operation in Europe that had started work with the Final Act from Helsinki in 1975 – in times of prologue to the end of the Cold War.

Some of us here in the room might also remember a great song from Sting on his famous Album “Dream of the Blue Turtles” from 1985, before the Iron Curtain actually fell: “The Russians love their children, too”, he sang, when warning against nuclear race and armed conflicts in general. The whole of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals and beyond is a better and safer place today. We all merit freedom and peace, but we also have to earn it.

Let me now try to connect this with present reality, here and today, to 2012, while Albania is celebrating 100 years of independence. Allow me to recur to an absolute classic from the early days of democracy, the Greek philosopher and teacher of Alexander the Great, Aristotle. The paradigm coming from Aristotle states that "only in democracies do people have a share in freedom"¹.

Albania has the youngest population in South and South Eastern Europe. Average age here is 30 years; 13 years younger than in Italy or Greece; 11 years than in Croatia and Serbia; and about 7 years younger than Montenegro – figure according to 2011 estimates of global data².

A striking question coming to mind is, how can this incredible wealth of youth become most effective in relation to the country’s welfare, clearly to the country’s advantage? And in peace with it’s neighbours.

The answer is indeed complex.

Nevertheless, I will try to analyse it here a bit in by reducing it under the light of two dimensions in relation to freedom as the foundation of democracy. *The introspective dimension* (you and yourself, the inner view); and *the extrospective dimension* (you and the other, the outer view). No doubt, the two views are interconnected.

Let me begin with the inner view: Every human being incorporates, lives multiple identities. That is what sociology is teaching us. You are a student but in the meantime each of you is a son

¹ Aristotle “Politics”

² CIA World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2177.html#al>)

or daughter of a family; a fan of a sports club; a resident of a town; a member of a civil society organization or a political party; and later in life maybe also becoming a father; a mother.

All these identities interact with each other in quick and complex ways; and in so doing they make up our days, weeks and lifetime. For these identities to interact, freedom is needed! By freedom, I do not only mean a person's physical liberty to move from location A to location B but, rather, the manifestation of everyone's virtues and values unrestrained by harmful social circumstances like discrimination, racism or other forms of cultural violence. And in order to achieve freedom, a serious dialogue must take place between you and yourself. Let me try to make it strong: trust yourself. Do not lie to yourself. Do not live in illusions.

The nature of this internal dialogue should be deontological which means always judging the morality and quality of your expected actions. For example, if you ask or interrogate yourself on your citizen identity or student identity, you should always be contemplating the ways to best become an active citizen or a successful student. Only by asking the best of yourself for the good, you can improve the quality of your freedom and that of surrounding, and maybe even of your country.

And now the outside dimension: In the words of Hermann Hesse, the German born Nobel Laureate in Literature of 1946, you can find an important key for success. Hesse wrote: "It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognize each other, to learn to see the other and honour him or her for what he or she is". For me, the words I just cited could not be clearer. Be yourself and respect others, as you yourself want to be respected.

I encourage you to live democracy as a share of freedoms in empathy with everyone that you interact in your everyday life. By sharing your freedoms you make your society more innovative, your democracy stronger and, all together, your country better.

Dear Rector Varoshi,
Dear students and professors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The next topics I would like to dwell on is the value of education, minority rights and active citizenship as three civil norms of our existence – there may be a lot more, so please accept them as examples. The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development signalled a new purpose in education as declared in the Bonn Declaration of 2009. It "reads that education should be of a quality that provides the values, knowledge, skills and competences for sustainable living and participation in society and decent work"³.

Clearly, more than an individualised practice, education is a process which transcends personal interests and links with the collective interests of the communities to which we belong. Because the better educated we are as a people, the better can be the societies we belong to!

³ UNESCO Report 2012 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002154/215431e.pdf>

We should always value the opportunities to education as a rare commodity. This can be shown by the global access to education which varies significantly from one place of the world to the other. We should remember that according to UNESCO data, due to various obstacles including poverty, 67 million children of primary school-age worldwide are kept out of school "53 per cent of whom are girls and 43 per cent of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa. Around 17 per cent of the world's adults – 793 million people, of whom two thirds are women – still lack basic literacy skills⁴.

In contrast to that, in more fortunate areas of the globe the demand for higher education has risen sharply "with tertiary students increasing six-fold in the last 40 years with internationally mobile students expected to multiply by 12 per cent annually", according to the same UNESCO reports.

On top of these controversial realities, the hyper-information technology happening at cosmic speeds helps connecting talents with markets all over the world in real time, thus reducing the burdens of graduate employability.

Another very relevant aspect of education clearly is Gender – you just heard some UNESCO figures.

There is a sharp correlation between education, gender and poverty. For example, think of a society with limited opportunities to education for girls. As a consequence, the new families of tomorrow will have poorly educated mothers. Their poor education will directly impact the upbringing of children in socio-cultural terms in ways of having children not valuing properly the importance of schooling. As such, a generation of largely non-educated members will risk growing causing backwardness and poverty. And there seems to be no difference for boys and girls: both suffer, when a mother can not help them enough.

Are there any social groups with limited opportunities to education in Albanian society?

Unfortunately, there are. Despite many improvements, the Roma community still is among those.

They are the maybe most vulnerable group who have often been subject to various forms of discrimination and human rights abuses. Being not well integrated into Albanian society, and tending to live in separate, very poor quarters throughout the country, they suffer from disproportionate levels of poverty and unemployment, and very often encounter difficulties gaining even basic access to health care, housing and education.

In that regard, the OSCE Presence in Albania together with the ODIHR Contact Point on Roma and Sinti, has been a promoter on the drafting of the National Strategy to Improve Roma Living Conditions in 2003, which made Albania one of the first countries in the region to have such strategy.

The Presence has been a member of the working group that drafted the new law on Anti-discrimination, which pays special attention to discrimination on basis of race and social origin, among other things. Members of the Roma Community have now the possibility to address cases

⁴ UNESCO Report 2011 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002127/212715e.pdf>

of discrimination in the areas of employment, education and services to the Commissioner against Discrimination. The Presence has also funded the publication of the Law on Anti-discrimination and a brochure in minority languages, including Romani.

The reason why I am bringing together education and minority rights is, when combined both lead us to active citizenship. The 18th century born French pioneer of social choice theory, Nicolas de Condorcet, had warned against those realities, when a few could legitimately be sacrificed to the many in form of neglect or lack of care about the few.

As a young generation of Albania that you are, I would humbly encourage you for the best of services which is defending the rights and values of social minorities in recognition of society as a total rather than a partial structure. Besides, I would also encourage you to read, learn and exercise the Constitution of your country because that is the vital document where your rights are enshrined.

Dear Rector Varoshi,
Dear students and professors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Indeed, democracy is a complex notion. Before concluding, I would like to touch one of my favourites. This is elections. One of its particular aspects as a process deciding political representation. Scholars of political theory often say that "through elections representatives win a mandate to act on behalf of the represented. The people is the sovereign, hence the representatives are its agents"⁵.

In other words, elections are a process of delegated trust which is cyclically expressed every two years in Albania in form of parliamentary alternating with local government elections.

Electoral Reform, as many of you know, is one of the current main working areas of the OSCE Presence in Albania. The Presence is dedicated to offering and co-ordinate support to the relevant national authorities in the implementation of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. On the other hand, the Albanian state is obliged by the constitution and committed to holding free and fair elections in accordance with OSCE principles, standards and commitments and in compliance with other known international standards.

Last November the Assembly opened the way for electoral reform by establishing an Ad Hoc Committee on Electoral Reform (AHC) which has to develop amendments to the Electoral Code through addressing the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, especially those stemming from the 2009 and 2011 election reports. As we are talking, the Presence gives administrative support to the OSCE/ODIHR in providing expertise to assist the work of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on Electoral Reform.

Within its first term (30 November 2011 - 29 February 2012) the Ad Hoc Committee consensually developed the draft amendments to the Electoral Code on the Financing of the

⁵ S.Alonso, J.Keane, W.Merkel - The Future of Representative Democracy, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 100

electoral campaign, Registration of electoral subjects, Election campaign and the media as well as some amendments to the Criminal Code regarding sanctions on criminal election-related offences.

With the support of the OSCE Presence in Albania, the Ad Hoc Committee organized a two-day roundtable on the “New Voting Technologies” and “Election Administration”, which was held at the end of last month. The event brought together the Ad Hoc Committee, non-parliamentary parties, Central Election Commission, Ministry of Interior, civil society and the OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission experts, who discussed on potential application of technology in voting and counting processes for the 2013 parliamentary elections. Following the event, the Ad Hoc Committee agreed on the introduction of an Electronic Counting System. While preserving the centralised counting process, the Electronic Counting System will replace the current counting with the optical ballot scanning.

This was a glance at the endeavours being made between the international community and the Albanian Assembly and other actors for the improvement of all democratic processes in the framework of country’s aspiration to joining the European Union.

Concluding, I would like to say that democracy is in my eyes the best and only platform for true freedom, for active citizenship, for social peace, and wealth.

Your participation is needed. In big and in small. It is your life, your future. Some may know that in this special centenary year 2012 the OSCE is chaired by Ireland. That is where my last quote for today comes from. It stems from the influential Irish political theorist and philosopher of the 18th century, Edmund Burke.

“Nobody made a greater mistake than he, who did nothing, because he could do only a little.”

Based on Burkes' word - little is no excuse for doing nothing - let me close by inviting you, while enjoying your life:
shape your future, defend democracy - every day!

Thank you very much.

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