



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
TO THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA**

Meeting of the Permanent Council No. 520, 29 July 2004

**Statement by Ambassador Zef Mazi
under agenda item "Review of Current Issues"**

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to make a few points, upon instruction, related to the reported OSCE Presence's activities in Albania

- Let me reiterate at the beginning our high appreciation for the work and assistance the Presence has provided to Albania all along these years. You have heard this in other occasions also by top officials of my country – for instance earlier this year when the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs addressed the PC. This is considered by us as value-added in the country's efforts to steadily move forward and reach necessary standards for the future integration in euro-Atlantic structures. We are convinced that the Presence's activities continue to be important in those topics as described under the mandate updated last year. In this vein, we would like to reconfirm our will to continue to work together in partnership with the OSCE in order to reach common objectives.
- Having said this, in the recent biweekly reports of the Presence we have observed an imbalance between sometimes detailed description of internal political and party developments and the Presence's activities. The former is inappropriately long and very descriptive for which we have long drawn the attention of the Mission and the CPC. With regard to the parts related to the Presence's activities, we notice that often these activities are not in line with the updated mandate and some elements are almost pointless. In other cases duplication with other organizations is but evident.
- Last week there was a Hearing before the United States Helsinki Commission. The Head of the OSCE Presence delivered a report the points of which are being studied very carefully in Tirana in the perspective also of other reports by other organizations, and relevant some lessons and conclusions will be drawn in due course. In this report, the Head of Presence, *inter alia*, made reference to our government's position on the visa policy. After saying that "*the creation of new jobs is too slow and the rural population is becoming totally disillusioned*" the HoP adds that "*the media and relatives abroad strengthen the belief that emigration is the only option. Indeed, this attitude is demonstrated by the government itself, where in the context of official international relations, visa issues and other policies concerning the free movement of people are high on Albania's priority list*".

Concerning these remarks, please note the following comments that we would like to share with you:

1. The issue of free movement is only one component of the priorities of our government and its program. This enjoys broad parliamentary support also by the opposition. This program defines 5 fields of action: the fight against poverty, border management, the

fight against organized crime, the fight against trafficking and the increase of possibilities of free movement of people through increase of credibility of the visa system and passports;

2. Free movement of people is a fundamental freedom and is based on all the relevant UN and EU documents. Our position concerning the free movement of people has found the understanding of all international interlocutors;
3. The request of Albania and other countries of the Western Balkans for the liberalization of the EU's visa regime, respectively free movement of people, is considered righteous from the European Council in the Thessaloniki Agenda. It is also being seriously taken into consideration by the Commission and other EU structures. More specifically, the Thessaloniki agenda states that *"We acknowledge the importance the peoples of the Western Balkans attach to the perspective of liberalization of the EU's visa regime towards them. We recognize that progress is dependent on implementing major reforms in areas such as the strengthening of the rule of law, combating organized crime, corruption and illegal migration, and strengthening administrative capacity in border control and security of documents. The Western Balkans countries welcome the intention of the Commission to hold discussions, within the framework of the of the Stabilization and Association Process, with each of them, regarding the requirements for how to take these issues forward in concrete terms"* (Point 7, EU-WESTERN BALKANS SUMMIT, Thessaloniki, 21 June 2003);
4. The Albanian Government has concludes a host of Free Trade Agreements, as well as Readmission Agreements, in order to give guarantees to its bilateral and multilateral partners. In December 2003 the Albanian Government signed the Readmission Agreement with the EU, the first of its kind with countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Our Government has also closely co-operated at the regional level to obtain this free movement. The efficiency of the Free Trade Agreements which we have concluded and are implementing with a number countries - encouraged to do so also by the European Commission – is lowered, *inter alia*, by the current visa regime;
5. The current situation has been commented also by the Euro-Parliamentarians, who in their *Second Annual Report COM (2003) 139-2003/2094(INI)*. More specifically, this report requests/underlines that *"11. Stresses that the present visa regime between the EU and SAP countries undermines and slows down the European perspective for these countries, and has become a source of humiliation for its citizens; calls on the Council and the Commission to establish clear benchmarks on the ways in which the visa regimes with the SAP countries can gradually be developed and eased as the countries undertake necessary reforms; is of the opinion that this will offer a tangible sign that the EU is coming closer to the citizens of the SAP countries; 12. Urges the Commission to encourage the creation of areas of facilitated freedom of movement between neighbouring regions, which will thus enhance the development of cross-border and regional co-operation.."* (Second Annual Report COM (2003) 139-2003/2094(INI);

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, all this we are saying and doing in very good faith and good trust, through also a better inter-institutional coordination at home, is aimed at increasing the efficiency of the activities and assistance so that the benefits for us are maximized, while also avoiding duplications between the Presence and other actors as well as avoiding discrepancies between programming/projects and reporting of the Presence and the needs/requests of Albanian institutions. We are convinced to continue to do our maximum in order to benefit as much as we can from the appreciated OSCE assistance. This harmonized approach can only be useful in our common work and goals.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.