



**Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania**

**Address by
Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of Presence
Press Conference, 3 June 2003**

Good morning,

I would like to welcome all members of the press corps here to the Presence this morning. I will be travelling to Vienna today to provide on Thursday this week one of the required regular reports of the Presence about our activities and the situation in Albania to the 55-member Permanent Council of the OSCE. Consistent with my policy of creating a more transparent Presence, I have invited you again before my departure to describe some of the content of the report that will be delivered.

The last report I gave to the Permanent Council on 6 February focused on the process of re-dimensioning the work of the Presence and the prioritisation of its activities. This report concentrates on current political developments, the progress achieved in electoral reform, the property issue and the current debate on the freedom of the media—all issues that are connected to the upcoming local elections.

With the term “consensus” now having become a fixed part of the politicians’ vocabulary, it is evident that Albanian politics is beginning to be conducted in a new way. Many of these changes have been brought about by the necessary modernisation of Albania required by the Stabilisation and Association Process and the NATO integration process.

Our report highlights the Assembly’s recent joint resolution on the European Commission’s Report on the Stabilisation and Association Process as an excellent example of the new form of responsible politics. It shows how the opposition has an active engagement in the political process by using its voice in Parliament and has had an important effect on influencing policy and the direction of the country. It also shows how different state institutions are beginning to fulfil their constitutional roles in balancing one another.

The positive political developments noted by the Presence do not necessarily translate into results tangible to the population at large, however. There is still more work to be done in terms of achieving concrete reforms in the judicial sector, in combating corruption, and in fighting organised crime. Attention needs to be paid to the weakening indicators of the economy and the rising concerns of the business community as a result.

The rapid incorporation of MJAFT!, for example, into the popular culture within the past few months is a sign that their themes have struck a chord with a part of society dissatisfied with the unresponsive and often insular nature of politics in this country. It will therefore be interesting to see how the future mayoral candidates will be able to respond to citizens’ concerns as the elections draw nearer.

Electoral Reform

The Presence has played a major role in supporting and facilitating the process of electoral reform over the past year with successful results. Much of this success is due to the commitment of the two co-chairmen of the Bipartisan Committee. However, the process would have long ago failed were it not for the clear desire of the two main political parties to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Having stayed some nights until after midnight with the co-chairmen, I can tell you they were tough negotiators. Nonetheless, there was an openness for dialogue leading to a positive result. The final amendments will now go before the Assembly for approval next week.

Property Legislation Reform

After lengthy discussions with the political parties, the Presence has produced a type of “roadmap” to facilitate debate on the property law in Parliament that will establish a Group of Experts to work with the parliamentary committees to review data on existing land and draft a realistic and satisfactory law by the end of July. Given the political nature of this issue, the Presence will be fully engaged as it was with the Bipartisan Committee.

Freedom of the Media

The approaching municipal elections have given added significance to the current and welcome debate on the freedom of media in Albania. The ways in which business interests of the media intersect with the interests of politicians and the degree to which influence is exerted on the media to gain political advantage raise many concerns. The heavy reliance on advertising from government institutions, the growing number of libel cases, or threats of such, and acts such as the locking out of journalists from Assembly voting have only added to the concerns of the Presence, which will continue to follow this issue closely.

Conclusion

Let me end today with this: because the new rules governing the electoral process gives parties equal opportunities, the local elections will be an important indicator of Albania's further democratic development. The extent to which parties will compete with one another by presenting policies to the public to win votes rather than by relying achieving results by exploiting institutional mechanisms will be a means of assessing how far this development has advanced.