

**REMARKS OF HEAD OF PRESENCE, AMBASSADOR EUGEN WOLLFARTH, AT
THE EVENT OF PEOPLE'S ADVOCATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

3 April 2012

Dear Mr. Totozani,
Representatives of Civil Society,
Ladies and Gentlemen

In the very first place I would like to thank you for inviting me to this important event. The signing of the MoU will form the basis and the framework for a further strengthened co-operation between the People's Advocate as an independent constitutional organ and civil society organizations active in Albania.

Several NGOs have shown their dedication over the years addressing the issue of human rights and possible violations. They have also contributed effectively to the protection of people's rights, in particular those of the most vulnerable. The OSCE Presence in Albania has closely co-operated with many of these organizations and supported them in their laudable efforts.

We can all contribute to strengthen the full enjoyment of people's rights in Albania. Best impact comes when all actors join their forces, institutions and civil society alike.

I am happy share the view with many others that the People's Advocate has proven to be one of the most important institutions in the country in this regard, also embedded in Albania's constitution: it is a safeguard for the rights of all citizens from the actions or failure to act of the public administration. The OSCE Presence in Albania has supported the activity of the People's Advocate since the creation of this office and, in our opinion, this institution has become a key actor in the protection of people's rights. In the past, the People's Advocate has set an example in being impartial and politically unbiased while investigating professionally cases of violations of human rights.

We are confident that, also under the leadership of Mr. Totozani as People's Advocate, who was elected consensually, the institution will continue to maintain this impartial constitutional position.

While some might claim that the recommendations of the People's Advocate are not binding, but in fulfilling and implementing these recommendations, the public administration can clearly show its dedication to democratic principles. I would like to especially praise the work of the People's Advocate's Office as the National Prevention Mechanism against Torture. While this mechanism has only recently been created, it has shown dedication and has performed hard work. Working closely with civil society in this regard, as the People's Advocate has done in the past, will further increase the efficiency of this mechanism, through exchange of information and expertise.

The OSCE Presence supported the work of the People's Advocate in many ways, not the least by facilitating specialised training for the People's Advocate's staff to effectively perform their functions. The OSCE Presence has also supported several projects of the People's Advocate, and the two entities have conducted several successful activities together. Especially fruitful in this regard was the co-operation in the protection of human rights of people in detention, including awareness raising activities and visible rights of persons held in police stations.

Mr. Totozani,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE Presence in Albania seeks to continue its close and fruitful co-operation with the Office of the People's Advocate. Together we are exploring new ideas which aim at addressing issues related to the cultural diversity in the country, with special attention to raising the awareness of the public administration and of State organs, and to sensitise them to the rights of all people, regardless of their race, gender, or sexual orientation. Civil society should and can be a driving force in these areas. We invite them to constructively contribute to these endeavours.

Thank you very much!