



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Address

**by the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers of the
Council of Europe, H.E. Mr. Edmond Haxhinasto,
Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister
of the Republic of Albania,
as delivered at the 916th meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE
Vienna, 14 June 2012**

Thank you very much indeed Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Secretary General
Excellencies Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is with great pleasure that I return here at the OSCE today to address the honoured Permanent Council in my capacity as Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

I wish to thank the Irish Chairmanship for the kind invitation, which allows me to inform participating States on the priorities of the Albanian Presidency. I also intend to touch upon some issues of particular relevance in the context of the close partnership and ongoing cooperation between the two organisations.

It is the first time ever that Albania presides the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe since its accession 17 years ago, which gives us a unique opportunity to contribute to this organization, which stands as the safeguard of democratic values and human rights.

Over the next six months Albania will uphold and promote these core values of the Council of Europe. We intend to pursue a set of priorities jointly agreed with Ukraine and the United Kingdom last year as well as some other priorities as a contribution of Albania to Council of Europe.

Concerning the *common engagement with the previous chairmanships* I would like to stress the following issues. First, **local and regional democracy** as an indispensable component of modern democracies. Our work will be focused in particular on the effective implementation of the principles of self-government using the full potential of the Council of Europe as the standard-setter in this field. We will organise a High level conference on “The Role of the Decentralisation in the consolidation of Albanian democracy and its European integration”.

Albania will also support the first Strasbourg World Forum for Democracy, to be held in October 2012 during its Chairmanship.

Albania will make every effort **to guarantee the long term effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights**. This marks the second priority of our Presidency. We will further pursue the implementation of measures adopted in the political documents of Interlaken, Izmir and Brighton. The Brighton Declaration stands out as a clear testimony of the political engagement of all member states for a proper and sustainable implementation of the European Convention of Human Rights. To this end, Albania will focus *on the implementation of the Convention at national level* by encouraging State Parties to develop policies and practices in line with the principles espoused by the Convention. Furthermore, Albania will engage in a process of *raising awareness on the European Convention of Human Rights by promoting the case law in the national curricula*.

With regard to the *accession of the European Union to the European Convention of Human Rights*, Albania will make every effort to bring the negotiation process to a rapid successful end.

Beyond the Human Rights Convention, Albania will actively advocate the protection of human rights, with a particular focus on children and women's rights, over the next six months. As a signatory to the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Albania will encourage the countries which have not yet signed and ratified this instrument to do so. We will attach great importance to the implementation of the 2012-2015 Strategy for Children to be launched during our Chairmanship.

Our third priority shared with the previous chairmanships concerns the **far-reaching reform of the Council of Europe** initiated by Secretary General Jagland since taking office two and a half years ago. This reform aims at strengthening the political relevance of the Organisation in the European architecture and transforming it into a more effective and more flexible institution. Albania will continue to support this effort and the work of the Committee of Ministers to review and rationalise the structures, the work and the budgetary priorities of the Council.

The second set of priorities is based on the added value that Albania will bring to the Council of Europe. As a country which is proud of its century-long traditions of multiculturalism and **inter-faith harmony, intercultural dialogue, tolerance education, especially for young generations** have been put at the heart of Albania's priorities in this regard. It is our firm understanding that "living together" is a major challenge for 21st century Europe.

The Albanian Chairmanship will therefore be guided by the motto: "United in diversity", and plans to follow up some of the important recommendation of the report "Living Together: Combining diversity and freedom in the 21st century Europe". In this context an international high level conference will be convened in Tirana in early November aiming at initiating an open dialogue among all stakeholders. I have invited today SG Zannier to be one of the key-note speakers of this conference and share the OSCE's perspective on these important issues.

In accordance with the principles of its foreign policy Albania will aim to promote **regional cooperation**. As ever, we remain committed to regional integration in the Western Balkans and further advance its EU perspective. In this context, Albania will support broadening the scope of Council's involvement in Kosovo, through the promotion of direct contacts between the Council of Europe staff and Kosovo authorities at all levels, as suggested in the Recommendation 1739 (2010) of the Parliamentary Assembly.

By strengthening Kosovo's standards of democracy, human rights and rule of law, the Council would offer its own invaluable contribution to a truly multi-ethnic society, where all citizens, regardless of their ethnic background, enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out to some other areas where co-operation could have an incredible potential for success and impact: namely the joint assistance that Strasbourg and Vienna could offer to our Mediterranean neighbours and partners to address their immediate and long-term challenges posed by the transition to democracy.

Following the Arab Spring and upon the initiative of Secretary General Jagland, the Committee of Ministers has reviewed the policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions based on three main objectives: first, facilitation of democratic political transition; second, helping to promote good governance and third, combating trans-border crime and global threats. Albania's Presidency fully supports this pragmatic approach and believes that our Organizations could explore possible joint activities that meet the real needs of our Mediterranean neighbors and partners. In times of economic constrains, pooling together human and financial resources provides for more efficiency and effectiveness in our joint endeavours.

Both organisations have an excellent track record in assisting transitions to democracy. We must be ready to work together with our Mediterranean neighbours and partners in a spirit of equal partnership, local ownership and in line with the priorities set out by common agreement.

While many countries affected by the Arab spring are facing a new stage in their efforts to build democratic societies, Syria is still closed in a deadlock. The civil population of this country is suffering an undignified violation of the basic human rights. We join our voice to that of the international community in order to stop the violent fights and the bloodshed among innocent civilians and we still stand for the full implementation of the UN Special Envoy Kofi Annan's six - point plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The continuation of the enduring partnership between the Council of Europe and the OSCE is instrumental to the realisation of a Euro-Atlantic Security Community based on the universally recognised values of human rights, democracy and rule of law.

The fulfilment of this vision calls for concrete steps to upgrade our cooperation in the fields of elections, the protection of national minorities, the fight against intolerance and discrimination, terrorism and trafficking in human beings, while ensuring complementarity and avoiding duplication.

This can be achieved also through high level meetings between the Heads of OSCE Missions and Institutions with their counterparts of the Council of Europe, through further coordination of activities between our field offices and the planning processes of the two organisations as well as by means of elaborating joint activities.

In this framework, I welcome the valuable studies produced by Professor Ulfstein of the University of Oslo and Ambassador Lundin, which contain a number of practical proposals on how the OSCE and the Council of Europe might achieve greater synergy and dynamism.

Synergies between the Council of Europe and the OSCE would benefit a great deal if the participating States will expeditiously consent to the request submitted by Head of the Council of Europe Liaison Office in Vienna to be allowed to have access to the meetings of the Permanent Council. This is a request that should be treated within its own merits and taking into consideration the unique nature of the enduring partnership existing between our Organisations.

I thank you for your kind attention and warm hospitality.