



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT CONFERENCE *POLITICAL EMIGRATION IN ALBANIA 1944-1990*

19 February 2020

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak at this timely and important event.

Our Presence has been supporting Albania's dialogue about human rights violations of the past for many years, and we have underlined in statements and speeches that:

Repressive regimes may be brought down by revolution or collapse, but unless they are also publicly discredited, the ideology can endure. The knowledge of "this was bad and wrong" separates a society even more from the prior regime, this statement contributes to a collective knowledge constitutive of the normative shift by disavowing the predecessor ideology and action and affirming the ideological change that constitutes a liberalizing transformation.

Recognizing and condemning the past crimes, this has in itself a transformative dimension – the public establishment of which contributes to liberating the society. Exposure of wrongs stigmatizes their agents, disqualifies them, and relegates them to a bad past. This advances the normative shift that is so central to this liberalizing transition.

A lot of research has been conducted on the question of how former war or political enemies may reconcile after war or massive repression, in particular with respect to World Wars II and the breakdown of dictatorships, be they communist or right-wing, and also with respect to the question of how societies can reconcile.

The results are still far from having a paradigmatic dominant character, but I see a broad academic opinion that without a dealing with the past, the divisions in society remain deeper, are more difficult to overcome.

Looking at the Albania of today I see strong arguments supporting this academic view: We hear – the more heated the debate the more often – wholesale condemnations of those thinking differently. We do not hear only arguments against their views, which would be normal, but we hear attempts to deconstruct characters. We hear the rejection of dialogue with the political adversary. We hear attacks on those who try to place facts against myths.

All this looks to me like leftovers of the communist patterns of behaviour. As scientists describe, political polarization is in few countries as deep as in Albania and the "Dealing with the Past", with the heinous crimes of the communist dictatorship has only recently started.

According to the scientific literature, reconciliation needs to be based not only on justice in terms of accountability and compensation, but also on different notions of truth, acknowledgement and recognition. That means sustained knowledge of atrocities – and knowledge of the wider political context and circumstances are necessary to counteract the relativisation of responsibility and the construction of historical myths.

A dialogue on the past is for me a necessary act for advancing the normative shift of a political transformation. As one of the main thinkers of transitional justice, Ruti Teitel, says: “There should be a shared knowledge that is critical of the ideology of the predecessor regime. Trials produce a part of this new knowledge. Restitution and compensation as well. But also other knowledge about the past suffering plays a crucial role in the state’s ability to succeed with a liberating transition.

Truth commissions, for instance, played in many countries a substantial role after atrocities and dictatorships. Memorial culture – and this event is part of memorial culture – linked to victims and suffering reinforces the change of the narrative, which is needed to build a liberal society after a breakdown of a dictatorship. As Vaclav Havel, the late Czech President termed it: the change from ‘living within a lie to living within the truth’.

In that sense, this conference today is another important and necessary step towards this truth. Killings of people trying to leave Albania, execution of those who were caught when trying to leave, the exodus of a substantial part of the pre-war elite in 1944, the forced migration of non-Albanian partners of Albanians after the breakup with the Soviet Union – all this brought so much suffering over people. This suffering more than merits to be highlighted here – and to be part of the dealing with a bad past.

We as OSCE Presence supported from 2015 to 2018 the emerging dialogue in Albania about the communist past. We also helped the Sigurimi Files Authority to develop. Today we are working together with the Social Science, Law and History faculties of the Tirana University on the development of a Master Course on Transitional Justice, in order to create for this difficult task the necessary academic backing in Albania. We are happy that we can contribute to this dialogue.