



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

**Address by Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of Presence
Press conference, 4 February 2003**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen of the press,

On Thursday this week, I will be presenting a report on the activities of the OSCE Presence in Albania to the 55-member Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna. I will cover the past four months since I arrived and which have been a time of change at the Presence. Much of the focus has been on internally restructuring the Presence, prioritising its activities and streamlining its work so as to concentrate better on those issues fundamental to Albania's further institutional development. I am anxious to learn the comments and guidance of the Permanent Council to our present work.

These efforts have produced what I would consider to be a qualitative improvement in the Presence's relationship with the Government and other institutions. With the formal openings of negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union last Friday, Albania entered a different phase of its development. It is one indicator speaking for the evolution of the Presence's work in the country.

The relaxing of political tensions over the past six months since the election of President Moisiu contributed to this progress towards resolving a number of long-standing contentious issues. It has made resolving sensitive issues such as electoral reform and property possible through dialogue and compromise. This spirit of more normalised political debate needs to continue so that the local elections, due later this year, can take place on the sound basis of healthy competition rather than conflict.

Within this vein, I am pleased to see that the beginning of politics based on the debate of concrete issues is discernable. Most notably, the very public discussion at the end of the year stimulated by Parliament's review of the 2003 State Budget raised interesting questions on government priorities, its programmes and how to fund them. The opposition's active participation in this process revealed the potential benefits to the country of normalised political relations. In this regard, the Presence has been working to strengthen Parliament's fundamental role in oversight of the government.

Despite improvements in the political sphere, however, there do remain a number of essential issues needing to be resolved, for which the role of the Presence and its ability to foster communication and facilitate compromise is needed.

The Presence continues to facilitate the work of the Bipartisan Committee for the Implementation of the ODIHR Recommendations and has supported the provision of ODIHR technical assistance on key electoral issues. The committee has functioned well as a consensus-finding mechanism dealing with highly conflictual issues and is now faced with the challenge of producing draft amendments to the Electoral Code. Recent difficulties reveal the need for sustained party commitment to prevent political grandstanding from slowing or blocking progress of legislative drafting. I will be travelling with the committee's co-chairs to

Vienna, where they will be able to brief OSCE delegations on the progress achieved and the upcoming workplan.

As regards property, the Presence has long studied the problem and has been engaging with political leaders to facilitate an inclusive dialogue. With over 50% of court cases involving property disputes, it is important that the long-standing property question be approached through an analytical identification of the problems of the existing legislation and of the current situation on the ground so that a fully implementable consensus-based solution can be reached.

There are specific areas of institutional reform that can be strengthened through the targeted efforts of the Presence, in co-operation with its international partners, to ensure the establishment of the rule of law, and the maintenance of security, particularly in the face of the challenges posed in the region by organised crime and non-traditional threats. In order to promote these policies, the nature of the work of the Presence has become more project-oriented in order to further Albania's institutional development through more concrete activities.

For example, in 2003 the Presence will be focusing on providing support to the Prosecutor-General's Office and on fair trial development within the court system. It will also continue to work to establish a witness protection mechanism until a legislative framework is put in place. In addition to furthering the democratic process through electoral reform and support to Parliament, the Presence is implementing a very successful Women's Rights and Anti-Trafficking Education project, a network of Civil Society Development Centres, and providing expert assistance to the National Council on Radio and Television to develop a workable frequency plan for the country in accordance with European standards.

Over the next six months, the Presence's political work and assistance projects will endeavour to support further the development of democratic institutions. In addition, the Presence's projects within the rule of law/human rights and security co-operation departments will support the strengthening of Albania's judicial institutions and their fight against corruption and cross-border organised crime.