

**HEAD OF PRESENCE REMARKS AT THE CONFERENCE *ENHANCING
WOMEN'S ROLE IN GOVERNANCE: FULFILLING THE PROMISE?***

9 November 2011, Closing Session

Your Excellency Madam Topalli,
Minister Ksera
Mr. Rama,
Mr. Meta,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning.

Two days of lively debate and discussion have taken place since I had the pleasure of opening this conference dedicated to the project *Enhancing Women's Role in Governance*.

I would now like to share with you, if I may, some of the main observations and conclusions that seemed to have come out of our collective deliberations.

Not surprisingly, we have seen a full and frank exchange of views and opinions regarding the 2009 and 2011 elections from the point of view of gender.

As we know, the number of elected women at a central and local level remains far too low.

Accordingly, a wider question is why progress has been so poor, despite a gender quota being carefully inserted into the Electoral Code.

Indeed, when we take a closer look at the May elections, we note that some 30% of all candidates for municipal and commune councillors were women.

So this clearly shows that there was no shortage of eligible women candidates.

So where does the gap between the number of women elected and women standing for election come from?

Let me contend that while a lack of compliance with the gender quota is obviously one reason, it cannot be the only reason.

First, political parties in very many cases did only the very barest minimum possible – i.e. by placing women candidates on the third, sixth and sometimes even last position on the ballot paper.

In other words, while the letter of the law was respected, the spirit was not.

However, can I say that, irrespective of what analysis we can all put to the story of gender equality in elections, one thing is absolutely clear:

Women continue to be underrepresented in politics.

Too many strong, capable and energetic women continue to find themselves excluded from elected office.

This is not only unacceptable – it is also unfair.

Political parties must do more when it comes to observing the gender quota and in placing women more prominently on all electoral lists

The further strengthening of internal party democracy will be an integral part of seeing change take place.

Political parties must do more in supporting women political activists, especially in terms of training and development.

Political parties should start taking care themselves of training their candidates instead of often relying on donor led programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude,

Opportunities for women to be active participants in politics are a key parameter of a modern functioning democracy and thus an integral aspect of the democratization process in Albania.

Simply explaining away the current clear underrepresentation of women as being part of the ‘Albanian culture’ is no longer good enough.

We hear much from all political sides about their ‘Europeanism’.

We now need to see their fine words matched equally by the power of their actions.

Political parties now need to do a whole lot better.

Thank you very much.

Ends