

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S INTERVIEW WITH *TOP CHANNEL TV*

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Journalist: Muhamed Veliu

Top Channel: Mr. Ambassador, what is your comment about the current political situation in Albania after the opposition has returned to parliament?

Ambassador Wollfarth: The return to the parliament was a crucial and extremely important step but being there only is not the end of the story. It is just the beginning. It is about having good discussions and wanting to enter into a dialogue to move the country forward, to create that atmosphere that is needed for consensual steps. These are clearly needed for the reform agenda, including European integration. So a return is really essential, but it should not only be a physical return. It should be a return also in content, combined with a willingness to perform. I find it very encouraging, a good start. What is also needed is a good tone of communication, no rough language, business oriented language, content-oriented language. I repeat: I see a lot of encouraging signs in that direction. This is very important!

Top Channel: Mr. Ambassador, the Opposition has made public several proposals to change the Assembly's Rules of Procedures asking for such rules to be the same as they were in 2005. Do you think that such a request is necessary to be implemented, and what the Opposition is asking is it right?

Ambassador Wollfarth: A parliament should function in a professional way and the rules of procedure are key to it. As in my previous answer, it is about willingness. But having good rules of procedure is key to be on an equal footing, to have a balanced appearance from the Government side and from the Opposition side. This is a precondition for having good work and the possibility for good work in the parliament, among other preconditions. In most countries, if not to say in all countries, in all Assemblies or Parliaments, or in the Bundestag, or in the European parliament, usually these rules are consensual rules. Now for recent history here in Albania, that centric path has been left and now I think it is time to return to consensual rules. And it needs to be clarified whether the old rules that were in force in earlier years are the best start or whether other elements should be added. But the rules of procedure are certainly key.

Top Channel: Mr. Ambassador is it right to say that you are backing the Opposition's proposals?

Ambassador Wollfarth: It is clearly not wrong. But as I said, the rules should be consensual. And it is an important proposal, it has worked in the past, and it is worth a try. Whether starting in 2005 which was proposed indeed, if that is agreeable, and consensual on both sides, that could represent a good start, but that is left to the partners. I purposely say partners, referring to both sides of the aisle.

Top Channel: How do you see the 10 proposals made by Mr. Rama named as National Pact of Integration?

Ambassador Wollfarth: That is an interesting title and it includes certainly very useful proposals. Whether one has to limit them to ten only, since there is probably even more work to be done is open. But two elements are clearly very important: one is the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, that is included; the other one, and we have seen how important it was again this year is the work on the Electoral Code. And just on these two elements, you have already seen that there is some content in it. However, all of that needs to be discussed among partners inside the parties and also between the parties. The best place for that, between the parties, then is the parliament. There the rules of procedures are key to coming back to a truly European and democratic behaviour and that only can lead to success, I would assume, provided that the political will is there to move the nation forward.

Top Channel: Mr. Ambassador you highlighted only two out of the 10 points included in Rama's national pact. What is your comment about the rest of issues included in the pact?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Well, none of the points is unimportant. But as I have said there might be more in it. But that is left for the parties to identify what really needs to be tackled. There are economic points in it; there are many political points in it. It is a good start and it is content-oriented.

Top Channel: Mr. Ambassador, do you see the 10 points as a golden chance for the government to agree, and the ensuring agreement will help the normalisation of the political life, especially ensuring the good functioning of the institutions?

Ambassador Wollfarth: As I have said it is a good start. There is no need to be limited. It is one possibility to enter into content-oriented dialogue and coming to steps when it comes to lawmaking, when it comes to create the political climate of mutual understanding, which is also very good for the investment climate in the country. So that the political climate has an immediate effect also on the atmosphere, and also then as a next step in helping to have a better functioning of the institutions with clearly more rule of law, more compliance, to have a better respect of the law. I do not want to use too much in that context the word of extra payments or corruption, but countering this is something that goes hand in hand with better work, with everyday better work, and creating that climate. It also has to do with making the parliament - this is also one of the points that should not be forgotten - everyday ever more viable, in order to have better checks and balances, together - government and opposition, also to control the institutions, to have questions and answers, to check on their performance, and also to have that kind of transparency especially towards the interested public, through the media, in knowing what is going on, and to see how rules are respected. Albania is among the countries where things like corruption are clearly illegal.

Top Channel: Mr. Ambassador, last question, there is an ongoing discussion in the political circles about the way the President should be elected. It seems that the voices for the President to be elected by the people and not by the Parliament are growing. Do you think that the President should be elected directly by the people?

Ambassador Wollfarth: That depends on the Albanian Constitution. At this stage the Constitution foresees a voting procedure in the parliament. I think – if I may comment

on my host country's constitution – it is a very good constitution and a very good provision. It does not have to stay like this for eternity. It can be discussed. A good place to discuss this is in the parliament. It can be also discussed in civil society. I would like to stress that when you would have an additional voting procedure this could mean that an additional campaigning is necessary. And an additional election then might also orientate the views into an election and less towards the reform agenda. Therefore, I would suggest to be careful and to do it at an appropriate time when Albania will have made more headway towards European integration. Looking at the region, many of the neighbours already have their presidents elected by the people. So this is something that seems to be fairly natural in this area. It is certainly worth discussing that option. But since the Constitution for the next president provides that he or she is elected through the Assembly that should be applied next year, in 2012, and from there, perhaps, an additional reform can be considered.

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