

**INTERVIEW OF OSCE SECRETARY GENERAL THOMAS GREMINGER  
WITH ALBANIA'S PUBLIC BROADCASTER RTSH**

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**RTSH: Mr. Greminger, welcome to Albania. Any time the OSCE is mentioned, the Albanian public always identifies this organization with the elections. Although Albania has been conducting multi-party elections for three decades, the international referee i.e. the OSCE, continues to ask for standards. In your view, why is this the case? Is it probably the fault of political parties which keep passing blame on one-another on how the electoral law is enforced in Albania?**

**Greminger:** Well, you see, elections are the cornerstone of every democracy. So, the conduct of elections is absolutely fundamental. And the OSCE, that is ODIHR, has been observing elections in Albania since 1996.

When we look at the Albanian legislation, we see that the recommendations of the electoral mission of the OSCE from 2013, 2015 and 2017, have not yet been translated into the Albanian legislation. So, this remains to be done. As I understand, this is rather urgent, because there will be local elections next year and I think it would be good that all the novelties that have been introduced in the legislation can be tested during local elections, before you move to national elections in 2020.

**RTSH: Why a full electoral reform is important? Just because we have elections next year and after 1.5 or 2 years we have general elections? Or is this an indispensable goal/standard for a participating state of the OSCE?**

**Greminger:** Well, Albania is a participating state of the OSCE, one of the 57 participating states, and, therefore, has accepted the principles and commitments of the OSCE. In that sense, Albania is also called to live up to these commitments and this is clearly one of the reasons why the electoral reform should take place. But, it is also in Albanians' interest to keep improving the democratic institutions in the country. It also makes sense when I think of Albania's strategic objective that is accession to the EU; democratic institutions, their maturity, are also a factor that is being considered for this. So, all in all, it makes sense from an OSCE-commitment perspective, but it also makes sense from the strictly Albanian perspective, because strong democratic institutions are part of the good governance of a country.

**RTSH: In this interview, I would like to also ask you about a phenomenon that is mentioned in the international reports for Albania, but which is also part of the electoral processes in our country: fight against corruption. What is the impact of corruption in Albania's democratic performance? Because, this aspect was indicated also in the OSCE reports, but in another form, such as the case of vote-buying.**

**Greminger:** Yeah, combating corruption is one of the big objectives for Albania. I think, this is again true when we look at the strategic objective of becoming an EU member, but also in terms of improving governance, in creating an enabling environment for economic activities, for jobs to be created, for poverty to be fought; for all of these, corruption is simply poison. There are numerous reasons why this country should fight corruption with great determination. Again, the OSCE has tools and programs to help Albania reach that goal.

**RTSH: Do you think OSCE could have wider span of operation to assist Albania in improving its democratic conduct, as a country with just institutions? Besides the assistance and expertise that the OSCE provides for the electoral reform, there are also other aspects and areas where the OSCE assists in Albania. Do you think this assistance should be increased?**

**Greninger:** Well... the OSCE Presence in Albania has expertise to offer in a number of areas. Again, I think, it is in the interest of Albania to use this expertise for reaching its strategic objective of EU membership, but also in terms of progressing towards good governance and creating an environment where economy can thrive, where jobs are created... better social development. I think we have alluded to a number of areas, we have alluded to the electoral reform, we have alluded to fighting corruption; the reform in the judiciary is a very important area. Here, again, the OSCE can contribute to that process. But, then again, of course, in the more core areas of security, the OSCE has tools in terms of preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. The OSCE has tools to combat trafficking, trafficking in human beings, trafficking in drugs. In the human rights field, the OSCE has a fantastic institution called the High Commissioner on National Minorities that offers advice, and I think that respect for minority rights are still a challenge in Albania. So, these are some of the areas where the OSCE and particularly the Presence in Albania can contribute.

**RTSH: And the last question. Albania is one of the 57 participating states of the OSCE and Albania is located in a very dynamic region such as the Balkans. In your view, how important is regional cooperation among Balkan countries, considering also the phase where these countries are at the moment, i.e. they are knocking at the doors of the European Union, - in individual efforts, of course - in order to join the EU.**

**Greninger:** Well, let me say two things. Let me first start with Albania being a member, a participating State of the OSCE, so looking at the region in a wider sense. And here, I would argue that Albania has been contributing already, quite extensively to the OSCE tools elaboration. It has been an active participating State in the Structured Dialogue, which is one of the most important dialogue processes there is. Albania has been seconding Albanian staff to key operations of the OSCE, for instance there are eight Albanians seconded to the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. I think this is a very important contribution of Albania to the OSCE, and I would actually encourage Albania to invest even more as an OSCE participating State in terms of participating, contributing to discussions, but also in terms of seconding personnel. I think this would be a way of giving a higher profile to Albanian foreign policy. Now let's look at the region in a more narrow sense: South-East Europe. I think Albania has been playing a very important role, in terms of promoting peace and stability, and I think this is definitely something I would encourage Albania to continue to do so. It is important if we want to create an environment, where countries interact with each-other, where they trade with each-other, and where they attract investors from Europe and abroad. So, I think this regional engagement by Albania is crucial. Again, the OSCE has something to offer, we have a number of programs that have a regional dimension, particularly also when it comes to promoting people-to-people exchanges. The OSCE has a program that promotes youth exchanges, it is called Youth Trail, and I think that this is something the OSCE can offer to Albania and to the countries of the region, in order to further strengthen co-operation in South-East Europe.

**RTSH:** Thank you for giving us the opportunity of this interview.

**Greninger:** You are most welcome. Thank you.

