

Interview of the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, with the national television channel, TV Arbëria, 6 August 2004.

TVA: Since you are towards the end of your mission in Albania, how would you assess the role of the Presence headed by you?

HoP: I would hesitate to give an assessment on what concerns my work. It may also seem as a conflict of interest, but this is the Finnish way of thinking. Nevertheless, If I have to do that, I would say that the OSCE in Albania has today a very good constructive role in the positive changes and co-operation with the international actors. Our activities have been successful and, in key fields, we have been efficient. We are efficient in electoral, rule of law and property issues as well as in parliamentary co-operation. The Presence is in good shape and has a lot of expertise. In the future, it can offer its support to the Assembly, the Government, the civil society and the international community.

TVA: What are the Presence's achievements and failures during this period of time in Tirana?

HoP: I do not see any failure. We have been very fruitful in fields which can not be seen by the public. The Legal Sector Report that we published at the beginning of this year is a major achievement and the Government's latest moves were in line with that. The process of witness protection has started and is moving towards a fruitful legislation. Despite any criticism from any of the political wings, we are regarded as a good co-operating partner and this is working well with the government and the civil society. If we have failed in anything, it is that we have not succeeded in changing the opinion that the Presence is something negative in this country, or part of the retro-thinking. Many people connect the Presence in Albania with negative and crisis times, but its role is not this. We are regarded by some politicians as a monitoring body. We have actually not this kind of activity. If we have got involved in any issue that has not gone till the end, there have been co-culprits, but, at the end of the day, we have our own responsibility. Mostly, the main responsibility lies with the political actors. The best achievement would be to win people's real trust and, despite some sporadic attacks, we are regarded as a neutral force in our contribution.

TVA: What about your relations with both political wings in the country?

HoP: The political forces try to do politics by often using the Presence as an outlet in their internal discussions. We cannot talk about the two wings as two unified wings, as there is a rainbow of opinions and stands within the ruling coalition and the opposition. Their reactions depend on the issues on the table. But our relation is very consistent: we have the principle that we discuss with all political forces. The tension the media are reporting about seem not to have anything to do with the reality. A few days ago, I had a very fruitful meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister, but the media reported that I was given the ticket to leave the country.

TVA: Why did your relations with the Socialists worsened all of the sudden over property issue?

HoP: On this point, the issue of property was not fundamental. The process was very good and all the parties were constructive. We would like to have a consensus as large as possible, but the conclusion in the Assembly did not go in that grand style. I made my points, Mr. Ruçi also made his points. This is not a discussion between us and the Government, but a political discussion. The relation with the Government and the ministers continues to be normal. Due to this situation, every recent meeting starts with the reference *Government appreciates the role of the Presence in Albania...*

TVA: How do you explain Neritan Ceka's request under the *slogan Lipponen Go Home!*, when problems with the electoral reforms re-emerged?

HoP: I am not going to give Ceka any pleasure by commenting. He enjoys the civilian freedoms to make these statements.

TVA: How do you see the current pre-electoral situation? How important the parliamentary elections are for Albania? How are the electoral reform and the issue of the Central Election Commission (CEC) going?

HoP: It seems I am repeating myself about these elections. They have a key importance. It is necessary that free and fair elections are held so that the trust both locally and internationally for the democratization of Albania is kept. We are not the only one to have this opinion. It is also the opinion of all of the international actors. The electoral reform is finally on the way. The Group of Experts already sent its first report to the ad hoc Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform. It is funny that these recommendations were again labelled as those of the OSCE, as violation of the Constitution. The experts are working with high professionalism despite the diversity of opinions. Unlike what some politicians have said in the media, the message about the CEC comes from the ODIHR and the Council of Europe recommendations, not from the OSCE. The Government and the opposition have fully committed themselves to these recommendations. The experts have made their first proposals about the CEC. It is up to the Assembly to decide on this. The OSCE, like any other organization, only makes recommendations, but it does not make decisions, nor issue orders. The responsibility and the decision making lie with the Albanian Assembly. I would like that the spirit within the group of experts also prevail in the Assembly. When it comes to dissatisfaction of the smaller parties, we are the wrong target. The right one would be the partners in their coalitions. My role and that of the OSCE is to make this process move with maximum consensus. Based on the theory of parliamentarism, every MP has a vote, but not every party has an equal vote.

TVA: How much did this tension influence your departure from the country? What about your new post?

HoP: Not at all. If my departure is early, this is because my country's Government sends people to other countries only for two years. This new policy was approved by the end of last year. Thus, they sent me somewhere else. I was aware of this fact for a long time, but I was keeping that to me. These are two completely different tracks. Regarding the media campaign on this, I would not say I do not notice this, but the work proceeds normally. The new post is very different and should be somehow created. The first issue is the Finnish community in New York, the third, fourth and fifth generations there. Besides this, it's a liaison role, also, financial issues, the image building of Finland. New York is the capital of the world's capitals, therefore, the post is very different.