

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT ROUNDTABLE ON LOCAL SAFETY
COUNCILS**
4 March 2021

Dear Madam Deputy Minister Kuko, dear Mayors, dear participants,

I am very pleased to participate in the opening of this online roundtable, dedicated to a topic that seems to have gained even more relevance in these hard times we are all experiencing due to the now-present threat of the pandemic; today we will have at focus the six Local Safety Councils supported by the Presence, and the Evaluation Report of their functioning.

Certainly, such times remind us of the high importance of having functional platforms for sharing concerns and for taking collective actions to address challenges that affect communities at the grass root level of the country, where everyday life happens, where problems are tangible and where working solutions may lay strong foundations for a healthy society. I believe we all do agree that in all times, but especially in challenging ones, platforms of collaboration between all actors who can contribute to the alleviation of problematic situations are the most needed.

I would like to take pride in the fact that the OSCE Presence in Albania was the organization that supported - since 2016 - the establishment of the first Local Safety Councils. I also want to express my delight that such successful experience was swiftly responded positively by the Albanian Agency for the Support of Local Governance and of course by the Ministry of Interior by issuing a Directive to the Municipalities on the composition and functioning of this new structure. The process of establishment of Local Safety Councils started in the municipalities of Elbasan, Librazhd and Cërrik with which the Presence in Albania worked closely to set up the relevant structures. Today, we are on a firm path for having Local Safety Councils established in all 61 Albanian Municipalities. In my positive view, this is a demonstration of the expectation that the Local Safety Councils can play an important role for the improvement of the local communities' quality of life.

In many different ways, the Local Safety Councils approach stands at the core of the OSCE's body of commitments, as it encompasses a wide range of values that my Organization strongly upholds and continuously promotes to all participating States: all-inclusiveness, participation and collaboration. With this, I would like to emphasize that Local Safety Councils are more than security forums. In essence, they are platforms functioning through a democratic process of inclusiveness, participation and open to contribution by all actors that constitute local communities – from local administrators to law enforcers, from public healthcare institutions to civil society, youth and religious leaders. It is, therefore, a forum and a process holding a great potential for ensuring a safer community life, while at the same time building bridges between all the local actors, who have a role to play in enhancing transparency and accountability of local institutions and boosting local democracy.

However, the success of having such important structures established throughout Albania is flawed by the fact that they are not fully functional yet. Within short, you will be presented with the Evaluation Report on LSCs' functioning, which was prepared with support of the Presence. Allow me to mention part of its important conclusions, which draw attention to all of us on issues that need to be addressed. In fact, the report has concluded that "these new structures face a series of challenges, amidst a developing legal and strategic environment. The Councils need to further regulate their work and guarantee the highest possible level of participation from all stakeholders". I find it especially important in the report when it says that "this process goes hand in hand with members' knowledge about their role and co-ordination in response to crisis managements, natural disasters and other public safety challenges. On the other hand, while it is true that all targeted municipalities have adopted Action Plans, they need to develop ways and tools to implement and monitor them, with clear impact indicators".

I trust that the discussions that will follow, based also on the Evaluation Report, will result in a fruitful continuation of work for the improvement of the needed environment for the functioning of these, albeit new, structures. I would like to take this opportunity to also confirm the Presence's readiness to continue supporting this process, by offering its assistance at both central and local levels to address any eventual technical shortcomings.

I believe such project can be considered without reserves as one with great potentials that can not only improve, as its name entails, the security situation of the Albanian local communities, but also very importantly can introduce a strong culture of communality and collaboration among communities and stakeholders to address a variety of safety and security challenges on the ground. Therefore, the Presence will continue to be a main partner in this endeavor.