



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON COURT ADMINISTRATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT

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When the OSCE Presence in Albania conducted a study on the efficiency of court proceedings in 2013, the results, quite frankly, were shocking. Almost half of the observed hearings were completely unproductive: No argument was made by either party, no document was circulated, no evidence was obtained.

It became clear that significant and decisive steps were needed to improve the productivity of the system.

The *Justice Without Delays* program, funded by the Austrian government, was a reply to this situation. It aims to improve the efficiency of proceedings in all district courts in Albania.

The project has been and continues to be a great, measurable success. I give you three examples:

- Take, for instance, the court of Kruja. Only six months after the implementation of the *Justice Without Delays* project, the average length of criminal trials was reduced from 135 days to less than 45 days. Every single judge was able to double the number of disposed cases in the time period.
- In Korça, the number of unproductive hearings fell from 35% to 2% in civil disputes.
- In Lezha, the average number of hearings was reduced by almost 50%

These examples are just three of many success stories. Around the country, court officials are implementing and acting upon the procedural recommendations. They understand the value of their mission: To offer fair and timely justice to each and every person, regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin, political power, wealth, or any other factor. The law is equal to all. The OSCE stands always committed to promote this core principle.

But let me be clear: There remains much work to be done.

To ensure a fair and efficient justice system, other equally important initiatives are running in parallel. We are all aware of the changes the Albanian justice system is undergoing.

- The vetting of justice professionals continues, while the Constitutional Court and the High Court will hopefully soon become functional.
- New anti-corruption judicial bodies such as SPAK are to be formed.

These efforts are much needed reforms to strengthen the Albanian judiciary and to improve the trust of the Albanian public in its court system.

The OSCE Presence supports the governing bodies of the judiciary and local courts in these efforts.

We are glad to support the work of the Albanian High Judicial Council and the co-operation between local authorities and educational peer-to-peer exchanges. These provide opportunities for sharing good practices at all levels. A clear emphasis of such co-operation lies on raising the capacities of the Council, the School of Magistrates and of the local courts.

All these efforts would, of course, be impossible without close co-operation with our international partners. For the event today, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Albanian High Judicial Council, the USAID, the Council of Europe, the School of Magistrates and our Rule Of Law colleagues in the OSCE field operations. I extend my sincere appreciation to the Austrian Embassy and the Austrian Development Cooperation for making this event possible.

Conferences like this are valuable opportunities to co-ordinate efforts among international organizations to assist Albania and the region in living up to the best international standards in the field of justice. These standards are not merely abstract concepts. They directly impact the lives of this country's citizens.

I close my remarks by wishing you a very productive and most interesting day.

Thank you for your attention.