

**HEAD OF PRESENCE REMARKS – ROUNDTABLE ON INCREASING
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES IN ALBANIA**

18 June 2012

Honoured guests,

On behalf of the OSCE Presence in Albania, I am very pleased to welcome you to this roundtable on increasing women's political participation, organized in partnership with the OSCE/ODIHR.

This event takes place in the framework of the OSCE/ODHIR project *Women in Political Parties*, implemented in Albania, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova.

It is also testament to the OSCE Presence's absolute resolve to promoting gender equality here in Albania.

This is, first and foremost, a question of fundamental human rights.

It is also inextricably linked with security.

Greater gender equality is crucial for achieving security, prosperity and full implementation of democratic standards, here in Albania and in the entire OSCE region.

Increasing women's political participation is a logical element in advancing gender equality.

This is particularly important when it comes to political parties, key tools of our system of representation, from which elected leaders are chosen.

Unfortunately, it is still a fact that the number of women represented in Albanian political leadership functions remains too low. This must be tackled heads on.

Given the crucial role in democracy, political parties have a high degree of responsibility to introduce all necessary changes for increasing women's political participation.

Democracy demands political parties to open their lines for broader participation from women, and at all levels of decision-making.

When this fails to happen, not only political parties, but society as a whole suffers from a lack of new ideas and new leaders. The potential for introducing changes for the public good is therefore not fully realized.

To begin with, such changes should include real internal democratic processes also within parties.

At the legal stage, the 2008 Electoral Code introduced a 30% gender quota with the view to increasing women's representation in the Assembly and local bodies.

Yet some weaknesses in the legal formulation were obvious following the results of the 2009 parliamentary elections, when only 23 women were elected for the 140 seats in the Assembly.

The number of elected women at all levels remains way below the standards of most European countries.

Many capable women continue to find themselves excluded.

Many women continue to find themselves cast aside from public service.

The current situation is, in a nutshell, not fair, not just, it does not reflect the necessary democratic spirit.

Political parties need to do more.

More when it comes to observing the gender quota, both with regards to its letter and spirit.

More when it comes to placing high quality women more prominently on all electoral lists.

More when it comes to supporting women in terms of training and development of skills.

Honoured guests,

Creating equal opportunities for women to be full and active participants in politics is a key parameter of a modern democratic society.

Simply excusing away the current underrepresentation of women as being part of the 'Albanian culture' is no longer acceptable. Certainly, not for a people, a nation that holds high European aspirations.

We need to see such fine rhetoric matched by decisive actions.

Political parties need to do a whole lot better.

I invite you to make good use of today's roundtable and tomorrow's training.

Thank you very much.

Ends