



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Presence in Albania

HEAD OF PRESENCE SPEAKING POINTS - GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE PROJECT - 16 JUNE 2009

[Opening remarks]

Mr President, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

On behalf of the OSCE Presence in Albania, I welcome you to the graduation ceremony of the first phase of the Women in Governance project.

The Presence is highly honoured that we are joined this morning by his Excellency the President of the Republic of Albania, Prof. Dr. Bamir Topi, who has kindly agreed not only to address us all but also to greet and hand out graduation certificates to all participants.

I welcome the members of the Project Advisory Board, and Members of Parliament, Mrs Lajla Pernaska and Mrs Diana Culi.

I also welcome the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr Henk van den Dool, and the Chargé d'Affaires at the Embassy of Sweden, Office Tirana, Mrs. Elisabeth Stam, without whose financial support this project would simply not have been possible.

Last, but by no means least, we welcome and honour all project participants gathered here today.

Coming from all parts of Albania, they have all shown tireless energy and dedicated commitment to becoming actively engaged in the political life of this country and to contribute to the further improvement of women's rights.

This project is the first part of the three year long programme *Enhancing Women's Role in Governance*.

We will a bit later be given a short presentation of all project activities conducted so far.

It now gives me the greatest of pleasure to invite his Excellency, the President of the Republic of Albania to address us.

[Closing remarks]

Mr President, your Excellencies, Madam Deputy Minister, ladies and gentlemen.

As we have heard today, improving the current gender equality gap in all governance and wider political structures remains an important issue.

Filling this gap remains a topic that all of us have a real responsibility to assist in.

In only 12 days time, this country will hold parliamentary elections that will have direct and long-term implications for the future integration ambitions of this country.

It will also be on this day that we will be able to better assess how successful these elections will have been for the further empowerment of women in Albania.

We will be able to evaluate whether the gender quota has indeed resulted in a significant increase in the number of women parliamentarians.

We will also be able to assess how large the turn out of women voters will have been and to see to what extent they were able to vote individually and secretly, and so eliminating the unacceptable practice known as *family voting*.

Excusing such behaviour as just being part of the 'Albanian culture' is no longer good enough in the year 2009.

To show that Albanian political actors are serious about pursuing their integration ambitions, especially now as a NATO member country, they should all be publicly standing firm and resolute in condemning such practices.

The election administration authorities have a clear responsibility to prevent such activities from occurring on Election Day.

Let us all agree that in these forthcoming elections, the Albanian people will cast aside the ugly spectre of family voting into the political dustbin of history and will vote for whoever they choose.

Let us now all look forward to June 28, where all Albanians will be able to exercise their constitutional right to decide who will lead their country over the next four years.

Let us all look forward to an election campaign, where all political parties are able to put forward their programmes and values in an open, free and transparent manner.

Let's see that these elections finally meet the required standards, where the values of the Albanian people are accurately and honestly translated into seats won in parliament.

Finally, in light of yesterday's decision to extend the deadline, I call on all those citizens without a valid form of ID to go now and apply and to all those who have already applied to go and collect their card – there is no time to lose!

Mr President, your Excellencies, Madam Deputy Minister, ladies and gentlemen, I conclude today's Ceremony and thank you once more for joining us this morning.