

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE THE
ROLE OF DECENTRALIZATION IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY
IN ALBANIA AND THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

30 October 2012

Dear Minister Noka,
Distinguished members of the panel,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first say how pleased I am to see many familiar faces here, from the different regions of Albania, which shows that decentralization does matter.

On behalf of the OSCE Presence in Albania, I would like to join those who very rightfully thanked the organizers of this important International Conference, coming so timely and focusing on the decentralization process in consolidating democratic reforms in Albania.

My mission, based on its mandate, supports national efforts aimed at promoting good governance and best practices in decentralization, strengthening local democracy through the implementation of European Charter and application of good governance principles, here, in Albania.

The OSCE Presence has assisted Local Government Units to strengthen their capacities, as a precondition to ensure economic, social and cultural rights of their communities. We see this directly linked with fundamental human rights.

This is why the Presence is focusing its efforts in promoting public participation when preparing for decision-making, with special attention to women and vulnerable groups and access to information.

Local self-governance enables the implementation of the citizens' right to participate in the process of decision-making, particularly in areas and issues which most affect their everyday life.

Local authorities have important responsibilities in providing services effectively and respond to the needs and problems of their citizens.

In this regard, the principles of the European Charter of Local Self Governance describe that local authorities are one of the main pillars of any democratic society and underline the importance of the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs.

These are fundamental democratic principles which are shared by the OSCE participating States, the Member States of the Council of Europe, with whom we co-operate to this end.

An advanced level of local self-governance can help bring the country in a better position to meet the necessary standards for the benefit of and in service to its citizens.

This requires local authorities endowed with democratically constituted decision-making bodies. Ideally, these bodies should also possess a large degree of autonomy with regard to solutions in their area of responsibilities.

Much has been achieved in this area. In this respect, I would like to commend the progress made in Albania so far.

Yet there is still considerable work to do at both the central and local levels, so that all commitments may materialize and become practical deeds.

For that to happen, we need first political good will among all stakeholders to advance in the necessary reforms, including the allocation of appropriate funding to the process.

I hope that we will see the required level of leadership in order to achieve these goals and tackle current challenges for the benefit of the citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to reinforce the commitment of the OSCE Presence that we will continue to support and enhance this process, so that it produces tangible benefits.

Let me wish us all a very productive Conference.

Thank you.

Ends