

BBC, 7 February 2003

OSCE: Normalisation of Politics in Albania

By Arian Koci

OSCE is assisting in the electoral system reforms

OSCE Ambassador in Tirana, Osmo Lipponen, presented to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna a six-month report describing the current situation in Albania and the restructuring of the OSCE mission in the country.

In an interview for the BBC, Mr. Lipponen said that the OSCE headquarters in Vienna supported the efforts for normalisation of the political climate in Albania and he expressed his optimism that the Nano-Berisha pact for constructive relations among the government and the opposition was going to continue.

Mr. Lipponen commented also on the position of the OSCE regarding the law on the administrative division.

BBC: How did you describe the current political situation in Albania to the OSCE Permanent Council?

Mr. Lipponen: The main topic was the fact that the constructive policies that are being developed in the framework of the Nano-Berisha pact have brought things forward in a positive way. However, there are still some streams that are disturbing.

BBC: When you talk about the streams that are disturbing, do you have in mind the recent developments when Mr. Nano and Mr. Berisha said that they had given up the pact?

Mr. Lipponen: In fact they do not say that. As I understand it, they want the other side to say it. I believe the pact is still alive. As far as I know, they are responsible politicians, and in a way there is no other alternative.

BBC: You said that the pact is still alive and it is continuing. Did they themselves, or maybe through their people, asked the OSCE to mediate in the current aggravation of their relationships?

Mr. Lipponen: I have normal discussions with everybody. Of course this has been discussed. I understand the way they see each other and it is very positive in the sense that despite their differences in opinion, they want a constructive attitude.

BBC: Do you think then that the current aggravation is because of the up-coming local elections?

Mr. Lipponen: Of course the up-coming elections are going to be reflected in the climate and the relations among the government and the opposition and for this reason we have to stay cold-blooded so that the process is not jeopardized, because after the Nano-Berisha pact was made, the process has been positive and stabilising in Albania.

BBC: What is the work of the OSCE going to focus on in the future?

Mr. Lipponen: Of course, the reform of the electoral law and the coming elections are two of the main issues we are considering because in a way they are decisive for the future political stability of the country. I also have expressed some thoughts about the new administrative division.

BBC: In this regard, Mr. Ambassador, the OSCE has criticized the law on the new administrative division and you have considered it as a premature one. What do you mean by that?

Mr. Lipponen: I did not consider it premature. I said that the time was not adequate. The deadline they have decided for the new administrative division would be before the local elections. The regional reform and especially the local autonomy through the competencies of an autonomous local administration is in the interest of Albania and the European Union needs it.

BBC: How did the OSCE Permanent Council view your report on the current situation in Albania?

Mr. Lipponen: I had a really positive surprise. I had unanimous support for our reforms and I was encouraged to continue the work we are doing in Albania. I did not expect such a positive reaction and for this I am really happy.

BBC: Mr. Ambassador, you seem very optimistic and positive for the chances of continuity of the Nano-Berisha pact. Do you think the pact is going to continue despite of the latest statements?

Mr. Lipponen: We have to see this in a political context. It is not very important whether or not the pact is satisfying from all the aspects. This, however, is the first consensual process in the Albanian politics since a long time ago and for this reason it has a value that needs to be respected and defended as long as possible. I say this because I do not see other alternatives for such important issues that cannot be solved with the parliamentary majority only; for long-term issues, which create a constructive atmosphere. We support 100% the normalisation of the situation and the return in a normal democracy and parliamentarism. According to normal European traditions where the bases of democracy are the constitution, the electoral code etc., there should be consensus because this is the only good basis for a continued build up of the democracy.