



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Florian Raunig

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 17, 2015

The United States welcomes Ambassador Raunig back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your comprehensive and detailed report, Ambassador Raunig. We see the excellent work that you and your team are doing to support the implementation of key democratic reforms in Albania as continuing to have a high potential for positive impact.

Ambassador Raunig, as you noted in your report, the OSCE Presence remains a strong, impartial, and supportive partner of Albania. We encourage you to continue working in close partnership with the government, parliament, civil society, and other stakeholders to ensure Albania makes sustainable progress towards meeting its OSCE commitments. We also welcome the OSCE Presence's plan to increase its focus on how Albanian citizens interact with their government.

As Ambassador Raunig's report highlighted, elections in June were overall positive, free from violence, and Albanian citizens were able to exercise their right to vote. But, as stated in the report, the ODIHR Election Observation Mission noted a number of irregularities, including voting in groups, widespread allegations of pressure on voters and vote buying, and politicized state institutions and media.

The United States notes that although progress was made in removing individuals with known criminal ties from the candidate list, some remained on the ballot. We call on all Albanians to insist that their political parties offer reputable candidates who want to move the country forward. Eliminating corruption and removing criminal influences from government is essential to Albania's development of good governance and democratic institutions. The most effective way to ensure this is for Albania to make systemic constitutional and legislative reforms that prevent candidates who are subject to criminal influence or with criminal intent from being placed on the ballot. We welcome the OSCE Presence's intensive work to build support for a parliamentary Code of Conduct, and call on all parties, including those in the opposition, to work to achieve its adoption.

The United States encourages the government and parliament to sustain their commitment to making judicial reform a top priority, with actions not just words. We want to emphasize the importance of the inclusion of the political opposition in this process. Reforms should be pursued in a spirit of multi-party commitment, while at the same time it is important that no one party block the way forward. We commend the OSCE Presence's work to encourage broad consultation and citizen engagement on judicial reform, including regional outreach events and active participation in parliamentary working groups. Importantly, the OSCE Presence is also closely involved in developing transparent judicial processes in accordance

with OSCE commitments. The Albanian people have waited a long time for impartial justice – a judicial system in which judges and prosecutors promote the rule of law and are held accountable for their conduct. The United States feels strongly that Albanians of all parties and interests must tackle the challenge of judicial reform before the country can take the next democratic step forward.

Thank you again, Ambassador Raunig, for the hard work and dedication of you and your team in helping Albania on its democratic, Euro-Atlantic path.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.