

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS – NATIONAL MEETING OF MAYORS ON
"STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES OF GENDER EQUALITY
MECHANISMS AT LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL IN ALBANIA"**

27 June 2012

Minister Ksera,
Deputy Minister Poni,
Deputy Minister Kodra,
Dear Mayors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you today to an event that touches on a very important issue in the further development of Albania, as a full-fledged democracy and as a European society.

The OSCE Presence in Albania has been resolute, along with our international partners, in supporting greater gender equality in Albania.

Gender equality is an issue that strongly relates to human rights, social cohesion, democratic legitimacy and security.

I would contend that no society can make major positive strides on these questions unless women are able to enjoy equal rights with men, allowing them to realize their potential in society.

Gender equality is also a key international obligation. An area where the OSCE rightly insists on all participating States to uphold their commitments.

Advancing towards real gender equality requires a dynamic combination of political leadership, institutional commitment and civil society engagement.

It requires significant changes in different areas: from electoral legislation, to wider public participation in political and public life, rooting out all forms of discrimination against women.

Progress at the local level is crucial in these endeavours.

Through promoting gender mainstreaming into local planning processes, authorities enable an institutional environment truly based on equal rights - and not on archaic, male-dominated traditions.

Traditions obnoxious for a modern European society and detrimental to the prosperity of this country - or any country, for that matter.

Moreover, advancing gender equality is also a recipe for better public policy, tailored to the needs and concerns of all citizens.

In such a process, we need to see a more sustained institutional dialogue with civil society groups working in this field.

I welcome the positive steps taken by municipalities in tackling existing challenges, such as budget allocation; launching important projects or introducing local gender action plans. Now, the 2008 Law on Gender Equality in the Society called for the establishment and empowerment of full-time gender focal points at both the national and local level.

Gender focal points play a crucial role in this process, developing programs and policies from the gender perspective.

The Law therefore entrusts all elected Mayors with great decision-making duties in this aspect of institutional capacities for gender equality.

However, the fact is that still less than a quarter of all gender equality employees have been officially appointed on a full time basis.

So clearly much more is needed to be done in this area.

And we need to see determined municipal authorities.

I thus strongly encourage Mayors to move ahead and take all necessary decisions to finalize the appointment of gender equality focal points.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We welcome the efforts Albania is making to mainstream gender in all areas of public life.

However, fine rhetoric needs to be matched by fine actions across the board.

Put simply – the Law needs to be implemented in full.

This is a key condition for any country, for any society that is truly based on:

Respect for democratic freedoms,

Respect for the rule of law,

And respect for human rights.

Therefore, I hope very much that this meeting today will be a place for new ground-breaking ideas and fine proposals.

They can only benefit this country as a whole.

Thank you very much.

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