

Symposium

“Albania 25 years after the fall of communism: rebuilding the state and society”

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**Contribution by
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25 years ago Albania liberated itself from one of the harshest dictatorial regimes ever. The doors to the outside world, having been hermetically closed for more than four decades, suddenly opened and lead the country into a hitherto unknown reality: The country was catapulted into the 21st century.

Since then, time, patience -and impatience -linked with the question of how to reach and keep a steady level of sustainable development of society, economy, culture, politics and the country in general play a crucial role in the everyday life of the Albanian people.

Looking back at the last 25 years, we realize that Albania went through a tremendous change. Compared to the former totalitarian regime, the country was turned upside down. 25 years ago Albania not only survived, but it also designed an ambitious agenda for its further advancement.

The country had to cope with extraordinary challenges along the way, like the erosion of the state into anarchy in 1997 or the sudden influx of nearly 400,000 refugees in 1999. Albanians mastered the existential pyramid crisis with outstanding stamina and the exceptional refugee crisis with human grandeur.

Furthermore, Albania succeeded in establishing the necessary set of institutions in order to create a basis for further developing a sound, modern, democratic and market-oriented state and society. Moreover, Albania became a member of important international institutions and organisations and is a candidate for membership in the European Union.

The challenge continues to lie in the daily work of how to anchor the appropriate spirit, culture and behaviour into Albania’s institutions: how to consolidate them so that these institutions can provide the maximum impact for the further progress of the country.

Many partners and friends, bilateral ones as well as international organisations, have been accompanying Albania on the road of consolidation and sustainable development: the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe and last but not least the OSCE, that opened its Presence in the country in 1997.

Taking the example of the OSCE, we can recognize how valuable and relevant this international assistance still is, as the topics of co-operation between the OSCE and Albania,

defined in the Presence's mandate of 1997 and 2003, are still very much among the main themes the country is dealing with today.

At the beginning of the 1990s, internationals as well as Albanians were convinced that about a decade would be enough to establish a functioning, well-rooted system of democracy and market economy. More than two decades later we realize that there is still a lot of work in front of us.

25 years does not sound like a lot in historic terms: building a functioning democracy and market economy from scratch in only 25 years seems to be rather ambitious, in particular given the point from where the country started. But in the life of an individual, 25 years is quite a lot.

This discrepancy might be one of the main reasons for the question we are still confronted with today, the understandably impatient question, how long will it take? How long will it take to fulfil the ambitious agenda, to secure a culture of democratic debate, respect for rule of law, consolidate socio-economic well-being and ensure fair market competition? How can we speed up the process so that the population gains confidence in the country's future?

Taking stock today, we realize that the Albanian people have a wealth of creativity, talent, hopes and dreams that still cannot realize their full potential.

I am convinced that the mobilisation of this potential depends fundamentally on a sincere effort of all segments of society to constructively and sincerely co-operate. In the past, all too often attention has been focused on dividing issues rather than on common goals. **Politics and media have a leading role to play: They are responsible for creating the appropriate overall climate where constructive and effective work for the future of the country is possible.**

Let me assure you that the OSCE will remain at the country's side, to assist Albania together with all partners and friends in realizing the common goals for the future of the country.