

## **Interview of the outgoing Head of Presence, Ambassador Pavel Vacek, 1 October 2007**

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Q: Mr Vacek you are ending your mandate in Albania. With what impressions are you leaving and what would be the message you will leave to the opposition and the government?

**A: Most of the time, I have preferred to work directly with the partners concerned and haven't felt the need to send any grand messages... A need to give a public message is often an indication of a problem. However, what remains to be desired is that both the Governing coalition and the Opposition prove that they mean what they say, I guess, by delivering on all good resolutions – they always need a constructive communication and sometimes also co-operation to accomplish key national reforms... Encouraging signs are coming of moves in that direction...**

Q: As Head of the OSCE Presence you have monitored very closely the electoral processes in Albania. How much progress has been done from one election to the other?

**A: There have been detailed reports produced by others...but how should I describe the progress in one word? Incremental...**

Q: Why do you think after every election, be it parliamentary or local, there has been a need to change the Electoral Code because ODIHR has made many recommendations?

**A: Well...it doesn't matter that much what cliché you use to describe good quality elections - be it "free & fair" or "according to the international standards". However, the acceptable quality we are talking about is given less by the perfection and detail of the letter of the law and much more by implementation and practices. The changes of the Albanian electoral framework have been driven by the wish to address the flaws and malpractices in the implementation by further perfecting or otherwise changing the law without fundamentally improving the implementation, incl. the known attitudes and practices...**

Q: Not rarely, you have been attacked by the Albanian politics. We recall Mr. Ceka who once also called the OSCE to leave Albania. How have you experienced such statements? Have you had difficult moments during your stay in Albania and how have you overcome them?

**A: Sure, the Presence is not to stay forever, elsewhere in the South Eastern European region the downsizing has progressed further. However, such things do not happen in response to marginal characters but on the basis of assessments and consultations. And the difficult moments? I am not sure if there have been more of these than of the rewarding ones, I haven't counted it...However, one of the most**

**difficult moments were those when our advice or offers for co-operation were ignored without a rational explanation or a viable alternative available to Albanian partners...**

Q: Your profile during these years changed a lot compared to your predecessor. You were less present in public with statements and messages. Was this a choice of yours or little by little the role of the OSCE is reducing? How do you see the future of the OSCE in Albania?

**A: I haven't seen any benefit for our work in building a high "media profile"... Instead, I have tried my best to improve interaction with local partners and increase the volume of funds available for the work on mandated tasks. The Organizations' Presence will continue downsizing and ultimately, it will leave... Whether it will be according to the 5-year calendar sought by the Government or otherwise is another question. Responsible politicians, be it on the Right or the Left, know what is realistic and understand that the phase-out will depend on the progress in domestic reforms.**

Q: The OSCE is involved in a very ambitious project, which is the computerization of the Civil Registry in Albania. How much will this project help in equipping the citizens with ID cards and as a result in having fair election?

**A: The OSCE assistance in Civil Registry and Address modernization funded by the European Commission is to indirectly help the provision of new Albanian IDs as the Civil Registry is THE database from which the issuance of IDs should draw the data. If new IDs and passports are pursued in parallel, separately from the Civil Registry modernization, I don't think it desirable as such but then the necessary minimum is to ensure a reliable cross-checking of the data collected from the citizens applying for the new documents against the civil registry data. I hope that by now everybody understands this interdependence of the two efforts and the risks and costs, including on the international level, in case it is not done right...**

Q: How do you assess the political situation in Albania? From your own experience as Ambassador, what do you think is the golden key that would bring a new political climate and ultimately have elections accepted by all sides?

**A: You should know better ... but what may bring about a decisive change of the climate is the pressure put on the political actors by citizens and the business community and also the pressure due to the need to deliver on promises made by politicians. To deliver on key reforms requires a change of attitude... That includes the electoral reform and standard elections: the trouble of all legal amendments and schemes has been that protagonists, both Left and Right, have looked for some sort of edge, advantage over the opponents and tried to hedge against the tricks, real or perceived, of the other side – at least until recently. That's why it's been always difficult to see if what they say is what they mean...**

Q: Who from the Albanian politicians you would praise more during these three years of work in Albania, for finding understanding and co-operation primarily electoral issues?

**A: To name one, I believe former President Moisiu looked for balance and fairness and deserved more domestic support...Otherwise I have always valued the time and attention given to me by all representatives - elected or appointed, political or professional, right or left... This has made the work rewarding...**