



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
TO THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN VIENNA**

**Address by H.E. Dr. Kastriot Islami
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania**

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most pleased and honoured to have been given this opportunity to address the Permanent Council of the OSCE today. This gives me, on behalf of the Albanian Government, the chance to share with you some considerations and views on activities undertaken by the Albanian government as well as on certain aspects of the organization. The fact that I am the third Foreign Minister from our region to address this august body within this month is a clear demonstration that Albania, and the countries in the region, do attach great importance in words and deeds and highly assess this organization.

Mr. Chairman,

The OSCE is a politically-binding Organization which rests on a host of norms, standards and commitments. Complete fulfillment of these norms, standards and commitments equally by all participating states will ensure strong cohesiveness and credibility

of the Organization and a faster approach of some countries to membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures.

As it was stated in the Maastricht Ministerial declaration, continued internal progress, enhanced regional co-operation and ever better neighborly relations have transformed South Eastern Europe into a region of enhanced cooperation and stability. We are convinced that strengthening regional cooperation can only benefit our countries. It also makes an important contribution to Europe's security and facilitates and accelerates the integration process that we in the region have embarked upon. Complimentary to this reality, Albania is taking an ever more active part in SEECP, SECI, CEI, Adriatic Charter, Stability Pact, BSEC, as well as in other regional initiatives.

Albania's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures is a key priority of the Government and the widest political spectrum in Albania. The activities undertaken by the Albanian government, in the context of sweeping internal reforms, are functional also to the country's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Albania is working hard indeed to conclude soon, within this year, our negotiations for a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union. The process for NATO membership is more advanced. We expect that clear a message would be sent to Albania from the Istanbul NATO Summit regarding an invitation to join the alliance.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me briefly present to you certain developments and achievements in the political field, in rule of law, economy, etc., during the recent months.

The overall political situation in the country after the establishment of the Coalition for Integration has been dominated by a stable

parliamentary majority. The stability of this majority has been clearly demonstrated during the whole activity of the parliament with, in particular, the adoption of the state budget, the fiscal package, the agreement on the privatization of the main insurance company etc., and in support of on time the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU. The Government has demonstrated a clear political will and demonstrated determination and commitment in carrying out fast and qualitative reforms principally functional to the country's European integration. This stability is based on constructive internal dialogue and democracy within the main political party of the majority and a spirit of understanding and cooperation in the government coalition.

In the field of justice, judiciary and law enforcement, first and foremost, measures have been taken to successfully establish a broad and effective legal basis. Some important laws, such as that on the Tribunal for Serious Crimes and the Law on State Police have been passed and are being implemented. Work is under way on the law on confiscation of property and wealth from criminal and illegal activities.

Adoption of laws has been accompanied by measures to implement them. We are aware that herein lies the key and most difficult issue. That is why we are focusing on implementation, which is also the motto of our OSCE Chair for 2004. The fight against corruption continues to remain on top of our priority agenda. In implementing the national strategy in this fight and its Action Plan, a detailed program of activities has been elaborated and is being implemented progressively.

With regard to illegal trafficking, the Albanian Government has launched recently a large scale Operation "Iron Net" in order to ensure a total stop of all illegal trafficking and prosecute all the perpetrators. This is a continuity of a number of successful operations against illegal trafficking in the recent years. In the

latest SEECI (South East European Cooperation Initiative) meeting on transnational crime that took place in Bucharest, Albania has been praised as a country with best results in combating trafficking in human beings.

Important measures have been taken with regard to improving the electoral system. Last year the New Electoral Code was ratified by the Albanian Parliament. This Code was drafted in cooperation with the OSCE Presence in Albania and experts from ODIHR and the Council of Europe. It was a joint effort, basically an OSCE/ODIHR effort. Compared to the previous code, however, it is advanced and with simplified procedures.

It turns out from the latest municipal elections that, in addition to the progress achieved, a number of technical problems, including the new code, have surfaced for which the ODIHR recommendations are welcome. We stand ready to further cooperate with the OSCE Presence and the ODIHR to make the necessary improvements.

The economic indicators of the Albanian economy have also marked positive results, in line with the general targets set in our national development program during 2003.¹

In line with the long-term programme, the reform in the energy sector financed by a community of main donors, the restructuring of the Alb-telecom Company accompanied with an increase in tariffs, the privatisation of the Savings Bank by the Austrian Reiffeisen Bank, the transfer of 40 percent of the shares of the biggest insurance company over to the IFC and EBRD, the liberation of the economy to observe and implement the WTO

¹ GDP growth in 2003 was 6 per cent as compared to 4.7 per cent in 2002. This makes us optimistic for the trend during the current year. The inflation rate in 2003 went from 5.4 percent in 2002 down to 3.9 per cent in 2003. Trade exchanges marked considerable increases during 2003 as compared to 2002.

directives etc., have been important steps of progress accompanied with an expected social cost. We regret to observe that the alternative action in this reform process has been mainly marked by certain anti-reform attitudes which, in some instance, have not lacked demonstration of violence against institutions.

Therefore, the progress achieved by the country in the recent years has been recognized and confirmed by a number of international actors.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now share with you some views on the OSCE. It is clear that the current role of the OSCE is somewhat different from that when the Helsinki process was launched almost 30 years ago. Though changed, this organization remains important to promote security in the OSCE region. The OSCE, as a regional organization in the framework of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, offers multidimensional, long-term approaches to security-related matters. They are organization-wide and could well be used by all the participating States. The Albanian government supports the role and activities of the OSCE in general and the program of the Bulgarian Chairmanship in particular.

The fight against terrorism is a priority issue that should figure high on the agenda of the OSCE and more widely. Albania is fully committed to the implementation of the full range of relevant international anti-terrorist legislation. Albania is party to all relevant conventions of the United Nations. It has supported all OSCE documents adopted in this regard, has enacted its own corresponding domestic legislation and is implementing it. In addition, Albania takes direct part with its troops in two most important international coalitions in recent years, that in Afghanistan and Iraq, demonstrating its direct contribution to the fight against terrorism.

The fight against human trafficking is occupying an ever more prominent place on the agenda of the OSCE. The role of the Organization in this regard is increasing. The decisions taken last year, on the Action Plan against trafficking in Human Beings and on the establishment of the relevant OSCE mechanism, are important steps which have enjoyed the full support of my Government. The implementation of the Action Plan and the activities of the mechanism, on whom we have to decide soon, will add to the credibility of the efforts of Organization in that regard by dealing with the phenomenon in the countries of origin, transit and destination, and not only certain small areas of the OSCE. We believe that when this package approach becomes operational and activities start to take concrete shape, activities of the Stability Pact Task Force should gradually scale down towards closure and merger with OSCE wide activities in this regard. This would avoid duplication, focus on the OSCE wide area for this OSCE wide phenomena, making or common efforts truly more effective.

In the field of human dimension, the Organization has started to concentrate with more pronounced focus on combating intolerance, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, discrimination, etc. We support and look forward to the outcome of the Conferences and meetings the OSCE is going to organize in Berlin, Paris, Brussels and Helsinki in the course of this year and the role it could play in that regard. In the meantime, while supporting the general ODIHR program and activities, we believe more focused and prioritization is required in those areas where we are certain to achieve maximum efficiency of outcome, full and active of participation of participating States and gradual ownership of these process by the states. Ultimately we should be cautious about proliferation of OSCE activities in general.

Albania considers the adoption of the OSCE strategies on Risks and Threats as well on the Economic Dimension as very important

ones. Similarly, the decisions taken on MANPADS, Stockpiles and Ammunition, travel documents, etc., are important, too. But the implementation of all the above-mentioned documents and decisions is even more important. I would like to echo here Albania's full agreement with and support for the motto of the Bulgarian Chairman in Office when he highlighted the Chair's priorities with regard to OSCE existing commitments and new documents - implementation. Albania remains committed to implement all the OSCE commitments and to making its ever more active contribution to the work and life of organization, as illustrated by the successful Chair of the FSC, other structures or groups of the OSCE and its active participation in them.

Mr. Chairman,

As Albania is one of the countries hosting an OSCE field operation, let me share with you some views in that regard. The OSCE field operations are an important asset of the organization. Their activities are even more important. Therefore, they ought to be functional to the reform processes of the host countries. Their role, size and activities, in line with the adopted mandates, should be constantly under evaluation in order to respond to priorities of the host country, the evolution and developments on the ground and the progress achieved. We fully support the ongoing work of the Group of Friends on improving the functioning and effectiveness of OSCE Field Operations, which we look forward to come up at the appropriate time with concrete recommendations. Albania's co-chairing of this group and its commitment to its success speaks about the importance we attach to the field activities of the OSCE.

The Presence new mandate is the basis for reorienting and focusing its work along these lines. We are convinced that its activities in implementing the new mandate will be successful. To this end, we feel there is need for a higher and more institutionalized coordinated work between the Presence and the relevant Albanian

authorities, primarily the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to ensure more effective assistance and more practical and effectively measurable result-oriented projects.

On behalf of the Government of Albania, I am please to reiterate our conviction and will to welcome, as always, the contribution of the relevant international actors, including here that of the OSCE. We highly appreciate the substantial assistance and expertise we are receiving. This said, however, it seems that certain assessments that fail to see the clear will and program of the Government for continued progress of reforms that, despite unavoidable costs, ensure the country's steady advance towards integration, do not seem to be very constructive and realistic. We have a common goal, therefore there should be no place for pronounced gaps and differences in perceptions in assessments made of situations or conclusions reached. We should build upon our common goals to gradually converge like true partners.

Mr. Chairman,

From what I said, it is clear that Albania has a high appraisal of the OSCE and its role. It will continue to work in it and co-operate with it in all areas of common concern as well as on those related to the activities of the Presence. The latter are important not only for what the Presence is doing right now, but also for the future, for what it will leave behind in terms of expertise, training and ultimately Albanian ownership of the processes it is engaged today.

Finally, I would like to warmly welcome Slovenia into the OSCE troika and wish success to you Mr. Chairman in your deliberations as a respectful chair of the Organization.

Thank you for your attention.