

**Excerpts of an interview of the Head of Presence, Ambassador Eugen Wollfarth
at NTV, Tirana, 22 July 2011**

Q: Mr Ambassador, thank you for coming at *Informal!*

A: My pleasure. Thank you for the invitation. It is great to be here.

Q: I believe this is your first mission in Albania as diplomat.

A: Indeed. It is my first mission and it is also a special mission because I am a German career diplomat and it is my first mission in an international organization, the OSCE.

Q: I will start with one of your statements you have done yesterday: “The name of the game is dialogue”. In my opinion, this is good news. There is a game, there is not a fight. But there is also bad news. This game is lasting forever and we are not seeing a winner. What’s your perspective on that?

A: Well the people of Albania should win. The integration into European Security Structures and into European Union should be the main goal. To reach that main goal dialogue is needed: Dialogue at all levels, dialogue between the people, but certainly also at the political level and also in the Parliament to reach a consensus to approach European Union.

Q: Thank you. May be we will talk again about it latter. You are representing in Tirana a very large organization, and a lot of people know about it. But can you describe the main goal and crucial aspects of the organization you are representing in Albania?

A: The OSCE has a broad mandate for the Presence of the OSCE in Albania, as my mission is called here. And we are here to help the government and institutions in democratization and the rule of law, respect for human rights, strengthening the state institutions, but also in helping civil society to become part of public discussions. In a nutshell: moving the country forward to fully fulfill the standards, the commitments of the OSCE community, which consists of 56 states including Albania.

Q: If I am not wrong, you have five offices around the country. Why is that?

A: Right. We have the HQ in Tirana, which is by far our biggest office, and we have four very small project offices through out the country; two in the north, in Shkodra and in Kukes, in each of them there are 2-3 people; and two in the South, equally 2-3 people, in Gjirokastra and in Vlora. The standards, when it comes to the judiciary for example, need to be upheld and maintain on an equal footing countrywide. The Project Offices are there to assist in this, to provide training where needed, deliver projects, maintain contacts, and observe what is going on in the courts. In this way, they provide import support. There are still distances to be overcome, so it makes sense to have these offices in different parts the country to provide more immediate access.

Q: We all remember you on 8 May when you visited the Castle of Petrela. Do you think you can describe Tirana and its politicians from that distance, your relationship with politics in Tirana?

A: I would say, and am indeed happy to say, a very good one. We are in dialogue, in contact and that is very important also to help fulfil our mandate because that can all only live when it is absorbed or integrated into politics by the politicians. But not only that.. I mentioned civil society earlier, because it is a process that should integrate the whole nation and we are here to help Albania and this is what we firmly intend to do. A good possibility of communication and access is crucial like in all parts of diplomatic life.

Q: I hope you would share a curiosity we have, can you give me one word or sentence that would sum up Berisha, Topi, Basha, Rama. Could you give me a sentence on Berisha describing him, for example?

A: I have the impression that all of them are patriots in their own ways and that is very important. You have to have ideas. You have to communicate these ideas and you have to be convincing to move the country forward. That applies to all of them.

Q: There has been a kind of debate in Tirana, I have heard the leader of the Opposition criticizing the IC here. He does not believe that the IC understands what happened here on 21 January. Do you understand what happened on 21 January in Tirana this year?

A: There was a demonstration on the boulevard, there was violence and there were four people dead. That was very sad.

Q: Talking about 8 May elections, in your opinion did we meet the European standards with these elections?

A: At this stage we are still waiting for the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on these elections and in the OSCE family it is good tradition to wait for that final report. However, there has been a Preliminary Post Election Report shortly after the 8 May already giving a sketch of some of what was observed by the relatively large OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission containing some constructive elements, better than before, but also noting some shortcomings, so it will be very important to see what ODIHR finally comes up with and I would expect also that this final report, like in the past, will contain some recommendations for the urgently needed Electoral Code reform.

Q: So you are quite sure that the OSCE will have to give us more recommendation on the electoral reform?

A: The last elections were local elections, and the stipulations contained as laid down in the electoral code turned out to be more for general elections, parliamentary elections. That was no big surprise. There is no chapter so far with the specifics of the

local elections, and this is certainly one of the many issues that should be tackled in the electoral code reform.

Q: I had an interview with the EU ambassador to Tirana Ettore Sequi in this chair, and when I asked him about the elections and the standards he said he was happy with the way the voters faced the elections and he had maximum appreciation for that. But as the worst feature of these elections he mentioned the mistrust among the Albanian politicians. Do you share this opinion?

A: My observation and also the work before Election Day was trying to help to come to an understanding of goodwill, in that case there was also an initiative in the parliament to come to an agreement, because it revisits one of the recommendations already put out by ODIHR in the final report on the 2009 general elections. The recommendation number one refers to the political will and that, of course, is an extremely important point. And that political will, let me explain, should include all levels. It is not something delegated only to politicians or to technicians – with technicians I refer to what ideally the Central Election Commission (CEC) has to provide: technical service. It also refers to the people: having the political will to express, who they want to see in charge, and the people did that in a splendid way. It was a very good election day as such. The main shortcomings lie at other and different points and there, I am sure, ODIHR will have something to say.

Q: Yes, that's right. But as you mentioned, we as voters we met the standards but we still failed when it comes to the mistrust among the politicians. In your opinion, is it fair for Albanians to pay for this mistrust among the politicians because as we said these elections have been very important as to our progress towards European integration? So is it fair for all of us, who behaved as Europeans, we voted as Europeans, we respected all the rules, the voters, is it fair for us to pay for the mistrust among individuals who are leaders or politicians but they are individuals?

A: The people deserve the best services possible. This is possible only when the political will is solution-oriented, and also when there is a sense for compromise, for a common way. When you want to integrate into a system, in this case a European integration, then you have to come to common terms because it is for the whole nation. It is also true, by the way for our project offices, because it is not enough when only Tirana is working. All the other cities and the countryside also must fulfil the standards when you want to move forward as a people. The services are needed at all levels. In most cases, when you come to the elections and to the dialogue it is working in the country, and why not at the much higher levels, on the nation level? So it is very important, and there we are back to the beginning of our conversation: dialogue is very important. It is in the process of dialogue that an orientation toward finding and wanting to find common solutions comes about, of course without compromising when it comes to technical content. It is not possible to move forward Otherwise. There are only very few fundamental areas where you cannot compromise: this is for example when it comes to human rights, equality of rights, and these fundamental commitments. In these cases, no compromise is possible. But that is not the name of that game: the name of the game is finding technical solutions on the political way forward to European integration.

Q: Mr Ambassador, in your opinion, what is the source of such political conflict in Tirana?

A: I am not so sure whether I am really the best person to answer that, since I am here now for just under a year.. I found that situation already as it is. It is about willingness and the political will. Co-operation, dialogue, consensus are an important part of the political scheme, but, then again, political parties do not need to be clones of each other. Of course, there must also be differences, there must be a competition for the best ideas; but these ideas must come and be discussed. And a very good place to discuss these ideas is the parliament. And that is what I miss, and that is, what we all wish for, starting with the OSCE.

Q: How do you see the electoral system in Albania since there will be much talk about changing the electoral code? How do you see the present one?

A: As I said, we wait for the final report from ODIHR on these elections. But some very constructive elements were there. Elections can be held, they can be held of course in a better way in the future, and the electoral code reform is necessary to prepare for the next elections. The next scheduled ones are the 2013 general elections. It is now time after the summer recess to start as soon as possible a serious dialogue in tackling the electoral code reform, as other reforms need to be discussed and prepared, and executed as well. So it is a wider reform agenda than just the electoral code reform. And this should be tackled as soon as possible. It would also help on the path to integration.

Q: What role will your Presence play in this process? If you can explain the role you intend to play?

A: Providing support and advice when it comes to drafting the new stipulations, for example in the electoral code. Perhaps, it could also be in the other necessary reforms, judicial reform for example. Helping with this expertise, this could be from the Presence, from my staff directly, in this special case with additional expertise also from ODIHR. And traditionally ODIHR and the Venice Commission on the side of the Council of Europe co-operate in providing jointly that advice, in this case, to the nation of Albania, in helping to formulate the articles of the future electoral code.

Q: You are seen, we call the three of you the Ambassadors' Troika. How do you see the effect that the Ambassadors' Troika is having on the Albanian politics?

A: We are trying jointly to send out helpful messages, to maintain stability, and help to provide progress. The most important thing is that the sovereignty, the responsibility, and also the respect for that lie with the Albanian side, with the Albanian leading parties and politicians, and the Albanians as a people themselves. Only then the development is sustainable. We help in that we can offer guidance, and, in the case of the OSCE, assistance in how to reach these goals; we talk of commitments, we talk of standards in helping to meet these commitments and standards. And the EU does that in their format, and the US equally does it in their own. So we try to support in accordance with our mandate: democratization, strengthening of the institutions, having a more stable rule of law, and that we do in that common form, and I think that it is very good that we also, as personal friends,

my colleague Ambassador Ettore Sequi and my colleague Ambassador Alexander Arvizu, are really sending out messages along the same lines.

Q: Now I am interested in your opinion as representative of the OSCE in Tirana. There is a debate that has started probably by the leader of the opposition, Mr. Edi Rama, on the constitutional changes. How do you see it, and do you think there is a need for constitutional changes in Albania, after some years that we have made them, recently?

A: First there should be political dialogue and really serious work on the wider reform agenda. We just touched on one point, which is electoral code reform, judicial reform, and certainly a series of others and at the end there should be the analysis where an amendment of the Constitution is necessary. So, you see it is clearly not a starting point, starting with the Constitution. Albania has a very good Constitution and the Constitution is a long-term document. This is not something to change like a shirt. It is very important to stick to the Constitution, to be inclusive when debating any amendment. Most likely, when it comes to fundamental things, like we just talked about, some amendments will be needed, but only after a careful, inclusive and consultative deliberations.

Q: So, you don't see any risk to create a kind of excuse for sabotaging the dialogue between the political parties, the debate on the constitutional changes. There is a risk that the opposition can create that?

A: The important first step is entering into dialogue with good will, leading the dialogue introducing constructive ideas, build on these constructive ideas, and then, maybe at the end, come to the conclusion of not only making laws but also of integrating some additional stipulations or amendments in the Constitution. So it should be a process starting with political goodwill and dialogue.

Q: Changing a little bit the discussion: We have seen you recently proposing a very interesting, I would say, law on gender equality. Can you explain a little bit more what this proposal consists of?

A: Equal rights, starting from human rights, equal rights for humans, men and women, are very important, and many nations here in the region have it. Croatia has appropriate legislation as does Bosnia-Herzegovina has it, and it is not something new in the European Union. We started decades ago in a building up the process. The UK had one of the earliest laws, probably the earliest law, namely, an equal pay law for men and women back in 1970. This is something which is also, but not limited only to, a European standard that would help bring Albania up to speed and up to the standards needed for European integration.

Q: How's your feeling when you talk with politicians about this? Are they honest on that?

A: Our impression is yes and we have, for example, also our programme from the Presence here in Albania, the OSCE Presence, which is called Women in Governance. There is participation from women from all parties, and it was and is a very successful programme and it is inclusive, so it is across the camps, the political camps.. We

would like to have seen even more women candidates on the parties lists, but as you see, there is always something left to be improved, but it was already much better than in the past.

Q: Yeah. This is true. Mr. Ambassador, I found on your website what they called a Mandate of the OSCE Presence in Albania. I want to go through the main objectives and points and will ask you to describe a little how you see these main goals fulfilled.

For example talking about legislative and judicial reform, including property reform, how do you see the situation right now and do you see any progress on that?

A: Well, property reform, as you might have seen, we held a public event at which a largely EU-funded project the Presence is implementing along the southern coast was made public. It seeks to ensure clear titles, which will then help ensure more security for investors in various fields, including tourism. The presence also works on the legislative process, for example, through strengthening the parliament as an institution with training for the staff, with support services like the library, now to a large extent already providing electronic access to documentation and thereby improving information flow for the members of parliament.

Q: Another point is the original administrative reform. What should the public understand from that?

A: To make it more efficient; one project was the civil registry, supporting the introduction of an address system; we helped with the introduction of new IDs and passports, namely, the biometric passport which helped pave the way to visa liberalization; thus, many projects, some of which are not directly visible to the general public, but thanks for asking.

Q: Another point which would be very interesting to discuss about is the promotion of good governance and targeted projects for strengthening the civil society.

I also believe we are in need of a civil society that is active and powerful. How do you see it and how will you help contribute to promote this power of the civil society?

A: By trying to speak to them as often as possible and promoting their activities. A very important activity, in my eyes, is the Civic Forum 2010 initiated by former Presidents Moisiu and Mejdani. There are many others, and their voice should be heard as well, those who wish to be part of public discourse, while not being a politician, should indeed try to make their voices heard. Also we should try to give an inspiration to the party politicians, who are necessary for translating ideas into real politics, into day-to-day politics, into sharing that job, and also managing the expectations. What people expect, what needs to be done, and also provide ideas: this is a very important tool. This tool exists in Albania, the potential is big, but it is still underused. It is very important to use it.

One way to convey it is also across the media. We have media development; we provide assistance media-related legislation, as is clear from our mandate. We also supported the drafting and adoption of a media code of ethics. These issues are related and help make the political system more complete. This also shows that, in the end, it is the responsibility of every single citizen to contribute to society to a some extent. Only to a limited extent can that responsibility can be delegated. Most of that responsibility rests with the sovereign, and that is the people; and therefore, also with the individuals, with every single person. It rests with the millions of Albanians that make up Albania in the end.

Q: Talking about media. Can you make any remark on how independent the Albanian media is, from 0 to 10 lets say? In your opinion? I am not asking now officially but your opinion as a person who is living in this country. How independent is the media in Albania?

A: Since they are from different approaches and not all oriented to one political camp, I would give a fairly high score to all, but don't put too much weight on what I say now. I would give between 7 or 8: fairly good, but still something to be worked on -- clearly to be worked on, including on-going efforts to maintain the highest degree of independence possible. I mean the mix is important, while a media outlet might have an owner, a certain editor in chief, and editors; it might have an affiliation and when that is made transparent, people have a chance to perceive well the opinion that is also provided besides the facts. When you have also another source, with a different background from another political camp and you know that, you can see that and then that is, how I would say at this stage, why we come to that relatively high score. Of course this is a never-ending story. You can never stop trying to have it as high as possible.

Q: That is true.

A: There is always something to improve and clearly also here in Albania.

Q: That's right. Another point and goal of your mission here includes the anti-trafficking and anti-corruption national strategies. How do you see these two phenomena in Albania?

A: Organized crime -- this is one of the downsides. The important thing is for the people to report on crimes and also to call upon services that can only be provided, at the end, by the state in cooperation with the population. Report on it, be conscious. Having to pay outside the normal legal fees is not in the law. Countering that needs the involvement of the whole society. And of course with trafficking or with abuse in families, that needs to be reported to improve the situation.

Q: Talking about politics again, it seems that the last session of the Parliament has been concluded for this season and in September the dialogue game will restart. What are your expectations for September? Will there be a good game or a bad game.

A: A crucial one that should be played in favour of the Albanian people and that would certainly include dialogue, constructive dialogue with good ideas in the Parliament. I am looking forward to that.

Q: Seems the opposition is putting some conditions on the dialogue. As the constitutional changes or the position towards the election of the 8th of May. Do you fear that this will block this game again in September or other months ahead?

A: There is a risk but to explain these conditions others have to sit in the seat. What conditions? They are elected members of the Parliament. What condition is needed?

Q: That's right. That is an answer that the leader of the opposition should give. All the Albanians also, yes. Mr. Ambassador, it is hot, it is the end of July. Is the Ambassador of the OSCE in Tirana planning any vacation and where are you going to spend them?

A: Since this is my first summer in Albania, I will spend most of the time here in Tirana but I will make use of the time also to go outside. But it will be more work-oriented, because there is a lot to discover and to see of the society and of the beauty also of the country, the mountains, the lakes, and the sea; so this summer is more dedicated to Albania. Towards the end of the summer, I will have some time in my home country. For the next winter, I look forward also to go a little bit overseas to the country of my wife in Latin America. When we have winter here in Europe, they have summer, so this is a long term plan.

Q: Thank you Mr. Ambassador for being at Informal. I hope to have you soon and as soon as possible.

A: Thank you again for that invitation. I really appreciated it.

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