



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSCE Presence in Albania**

**Press Conference
Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of Presence
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Today is my last day this time here in Albania, and after two years of having headed the OSCE Presence I will be delivering my final report to the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna on Thursday. This report is a detailed account which focuses mainly on the activities and the projects of the Presence. The objective of this report is to show that, while the Presence has expressed its concerns on a wide range of issues related to Albania's democratic and institutional development, it is also implementing a series of projects together with Albanian authorities designed to address those concerns and to support positive change.

Foremost among the issues is of course electoral reform. Despite some improvements, Albania has not yet been able to move beyond elections being a main focus of attention and source for political tension, particularly when there has been noticeable progress in institutional development elsewhere in the country. With the parliamentary elections now fast approaching, the warning bell has already been rung, namely by the European Union in its recent declaration, which the Presence also strongly supported.

Although the process of electoral reform is now going on, it has suffered from initial delays. And, we see that the work of the ad hoc committee is currently blocked without any accomplishments beyond the proposals received from the Technical Experts Group. The TEG has indeed been working, under enormous pressure, to draft amendments for the committee's review on the composition of the CEC, improving the voter lists, and the composition and work of the middle and lower-level election commissions.

But the question on electoral reform is not really about the legal or technical proposals being made. It is really a question of political will—the political will of Albania's politicians to conduct democratic elections according to international standards.

As regards the other major issue of property restitution and compensation, our report recognizes the achievement of the law being passed. We had worked to the last minute so that consensus on the law could have been maintained. However, for the reasons before mentioned but also for substantial reasons the Presence held reservations over some of the last minute changes to the law. Nonetheless, the law's adoption marks an important accomplishment. Now the Presence will give a strong contribution for drafting the by-laws and other acts and especially for the property registration and general awareness of the law.

As regards the fight against trafficking and organised crime, the Presence has been working to support the state structures on witness protection, asset seizure and money

laundering and has been promoting women's rights and anti-trafficking awareness. The Presence also yesterday donated its entire nationwide radio-communications network to the Albanian border police.

In the field of rule of law, we have been studying the judicial sector and offered a series of recommendations in our *Legal Sector Report* and have just recently completed a more detailed study of Court for Serious Crimes for which recommendations are forthcoming. We are also working to promote minority education rights, worker's rights, juvenile justice and standards in pre-trial detention.

The Presence is supporting a nationwide network of civil society development centres, and has been undertaking projects to promote youth entrepreneurship, environmental awareness and support for people with disabilities and women's roles in society.

Overall, I am most pleased to have witnessed the dynamic development of the Albanian Parliament. This body has really become a forum for political debate and even possible compromise. The Parliament is making great strides to modernize itself, something which we are also assisting, to meet the challenges and increased demands being placed on it. As an institution, it is beginning to mature in a positive direction.

In closing, these past two years were immensely enjoyable to me and, as you can see from the activities briefly described here, it has been a lot of hard work. Many important accomplishments were made. I will leave here with good memories of Albania and its people and am very hopeful about Albania's chances for future growth and development.