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Interview with Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Osmo Lipponen

By Ornela Bego

Now the OSCE has a new role in Albania and the reorientation of its activities has been successful and useful to the country, said Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of OSCE Presence in Albania, in an interview with Klan TV, opposing the rumours that ask for this mission to leave Albania. He explained the progress of the talks over the latest OSCE mediation in order to reach consensus by all parties on property law. Ambassador Lipponen also said that OSCE is preparing another report on Albania, which will be published at the beginning of June.

- **Despite the efforts of the OSCE regarding the bipartisan commission, the process is blocked over the issue of the seventh member of the Central Election Commission, which has blocked also the replacement of the members whose mandate has expired. How do you think this problem can be solved and will the OSCE intervene again?**

I am sure that the remaining problems can be solved through further negotiations and I am sure that we will have a further role in facilitating and finding the needed solutions. Actually, we have been following the situation and we have certain thought processes ready to evolve.

- **Will the OSCE enter the process again at this point?**

We probably will, but you can enter only if you are wanted and needed, and it looks like that both the government and the opposition are pretty happy with our role and are inviting us to facilitate again, to finalize these small details that have still remained open.

- **OSCE has committed itself to negotiate in order to compile law on property upon the agreement of all parties. How do you think this could be accomplished? Have you begun the negotiations?**

Hard work, political wisdom and the will to compromise will be needed for completing this task. We have already started with the practical work and are now in the process of collecting more data, composing our expert team and finalizing the networking with all interested parties and the government. I have recently discussed, with the highest political levels, the road map and how we should proceed. It is practically equal to what we have already agreed upon with the Speaker of the parliament, with small modifications, which we have found necessary after receiving the first comments by the parties. We now have enough time to try to finish the work by the end of July. Presently, we are still preparing

the basics. They include further negotiations with different groups. The parliament will later on be doing its own work and we will then see the final results. I believe that we, and first of all the parliament, will find and be responsible for good, lasting and fair political solutions.

- **Will it be difficult?**

Of course it will be difficult, but I believe we will manage.

- **The last OSCE report was very critical on the events in the country. Do you see any progress in your remarks? Will OSCE have any other report on the last months?**

I would say that the report was very constructive and fair. It was also welcomed by the Government. One of the basic approaches I have is that you have to speak about facts in real terms. The problems Albania is facing are enormous and one just has to admit that they could not be overcome overnight. They need constant, long term work, and they have to be recognized. Our next report will be presented before the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna at the beginning of June.

- **What will be the content of the report?**

It is a bit too early to say what will be the content. It will have some positive elements, but it will also continue with a constructive, positive, but critical line.

- **What are the critical areas?**

I believe that being critical is not actually criticism. It means that we will recognize the difficulties. We also have to tell openly if there has been a progress made, if the progress has been slow, etc. But, I would go back to what I have said. The problems are big, and it is normal to expect difficulties. We are talking about a long-term process, which at all times needs a determined push forward.

- **What is your opinion about organized crime and trafficking, and the fight against them?**

Organized crime, corruption and trafficking are among the difficult, immense issues this country is trying to tackle. They are so huge that they require further intensive and coordinated efforts by the Albanian government and the international community. That is the only way to achieve the lasting results.

- **How do you evaluate the political climate in the country after the agreement between Nano and Berisha failed? Do you think that it will somehow influence the local elections campaign?**

I have to say that I disagree with you. Even though there have been ups and downs in this process, I think this agreement is a major success and it has achieved the main results it

aimed at achieving. The thing that has not been praised enough is that it has brought, for the first time in a very long time, real negotiation and consensual elements in the politics of this country, and an understanding that there can be a win-win situation. So far, all the politics has been labeled by the so-called 'zero sum' thinking, which is extremely harmful.

- **What do you think about the preparations for the local elections? In OSCE opinion, is the electoral infrastructure ready?**

The practical preparations have started. They are only in their initial stage. As the media have also learned, the first steps in the voter registration have been undertaken. This is a long and very demanding process, which I believe the international community, and especially the OSCE, the ODIHR, will be giving their support to, so that the elections occur in a technically perfect situation.

- **Do you think that the presence of the OSCE is still needed in Albania?**

I am strongly of that opinion. And, of course it is not only my personal thinking, that we have found a new role; the reorientation of our activities has been pretty successful and we have been helpful to the country. And, if I refer to the opinion of the government and various political actors, on Wednesday Prime Minister Nano made it very clear to me that our presence is very much welcome and the Government is by no means showing us the door. Also, we have had support from the leaders of the opposition. Thus, I think this is a very healthy and good situation, in which we can continue working with our mandate and providing our constructive services to Albania.