

Human rights need all of us

By Ambassador Eugen Wollfarth

In a wonderful 1960s love song, the Beatles asked: "Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64?" Sixty-four years ago in 1948, when the International Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed, Albania was already under a cruel national communist dictatorship. Back then, Albania was in a self-destruct mode, committing all sorts of serious crimes against its own population for several decades. Now, in 2012, Albania can tell a different, a much better story. It joined two decades ago the nations that, throughout the world, are caring for and being "in love" with human rights.

Since 1997, the year when the OSCE Presence in Albania was established, my mission and that of many others have contributed to the promotion of Human Rights in all aspects of life in Albania. Human Rights are a fundamental and the noblest goal in our mandate. Today, human rights and their promotion include all aspects of our work. As core commitments for OSCE participating States, including Albania, the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms is "the first responsibility of government". We assist the Albanian authorities in support of their efforts to reform and strengthen Albania, with a special focus on human rights.

In 2012, Albania has reached its highest level ever regarding human rights. But this is not the end of the story, not the end of the necessary work.

The mandate of the OSCE Presence tasks our thematic departments to include a wide range of human rights related issues in their activities. Here are just some recent examples: In the area of our police assistance work, training sessions on diversity issues were organised, both a Strategic Training for higher-ranking police officers and a training of trainers for instructors and trainers of the Albanian State Police. Respecting diversity implies a policy of zero tolerance towards any kind of discrimination, in particular also within State institutions. In co-operation with the Tirana Police Directorate, Tirana Municipality and the Faculty of Fine Arts, the Presence also organised a Bus Art project, to raise public awareness against domestic violence through posters produced by art students.

The OSCE Presence also promotes the application of good governance principles at central and local level. This includes the support to initiatives that tackle the root causes of corruption, money laundering, trafficking and illegal migration, as well as promote participation in decision-making and accountability. Only a participatory and transparent government, both at central and local level, will fully guarantee the human rights of all citizens. For this purpose, the Presence organised activities supporting the implementation of the Aarhus Convention which promoted the right to information, as an important human rights principle. The fundamental right to a fair trial and equal access to an independent and transparent judiciary, as well as the right of persons in detention to be treated with dignity underlie the Presence's judicial and prison reform activities. The OSCE Presence has also

actively encouraged alternative sentences to imprisonment, working with the Ministry of Justice to develop legislation and training standards for the newly established Probation Service.

Since its 1997 establishment in Albania, the OSCE Presence has witnessed remarkable progress in human rights protection and accountability. In the last year alone, significant steps have been seen: there has been improvement in the protection of freedom of expression, through the latest amendments to the Criminal Code. In the justice system, the newly introduced electronic monitoring is a major step towards improving the rights of accused, as well as the rights of detained persons, by giving them the opportunity to leave the prison system, while still under surveillance. This means, improvement for their life and less expenses for the State budget, which can be used for other purposes. Also for the first time this year, an equal number of women and men graduated from the Police Formation Centre, a laudable effort to address issues of diversity and gender.

The Albanian institutions have contributed to this improved situation of human rights in the country. Albania also counts several institutions specifically mandated to promote and protect human rights, and to hold other institutions accountable in cases of violations. Solid work of the new People's Advocate, in his role of public human rights defender of all, and of minorities in particular, has clearly strengthened the overall rights protection in the country.

Every citizen is part and should feel part of Albania's State structure and should contribute to it. This is particularly relevant during elections, when citizens have the greatest democratic right of all: the right to vote, to do so freely, and to decide for the future government. But let us not forget that also in every-day life, citizens have the right and the responsibility to contribute to the State structure, first and foremost through respectful interaction, the *Miteinander* in society. The respect paid to others has to start in the family. Women and children are still much too often victims of domestic violence. This violence in families is a breach of fundamental human rights.

Regarding children and youth, I would like to focus here on one specific human right, which will also help guaranteeing mutual respect and understanding in society: the right to education. Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits. OSCE participating States have recognised the importance of this right and have committed to ensure "access by all to various types and levels of education without discrimination as to race, colour, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property birth or other status." (Vienna, 1989)

An inclusive education for all is the foundation not only for a tolerant, but also of a prosperous society. When it comes to building an inclusive and also economically successful State, in which every individual takes responsibility for the overall well-being of the country, let me highlight the particular importance of civic education. Understanding how State institutions work, increasing knowledge of the fundamental democratic principles and values underlying the State, as well as the role of each citizen therein, form the basis of future civic involvement and thus of a pluralistic democratic State. Making civic and human rights education a priority is not only an essential integral part of fulfilling Albania's OSCE commitments, it is also a crucial step to promote a modern, stable and democratic country upholding the human rights of all its individuals. The OSCE Presence in Albania has therefore actively promoted this concept through organising civic engagement activities for young people by working with high school students from different parts of the country. We supported a visit of students from Tirana, Kukës and Vlora to the highest authorities of the State,

such as the President, the Prime Minister, the Parliament and the Constitutional Court. Projects like this contribute to an increased understanding of the human rights and responsibilities of citizens, functions of a constitutional democracy and how to be effective and responsible citizens.

These preparations will also help to ensure that Albania will further strengthen its model role held so far in the region as a country of peaceful co-existence between communities of different ethnicities and different religions. Keeping up this flagship role of tolerance is something that deserves constant care and dedication.

With 64 years of Human Rights declared, with all good reason we can say: "Yes, we still need them, we still need them, we all - the free and peace-loving people around the globe!"