



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

**REMARKS BY HEAD OF PRESENCE, AMBASSADOR FLORIAN RAUNIG,
AT REGIONAL MEETING OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS**

Tirana, 27 April 2016

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy to see here such a large group of women parliamentarians from the Balkan region, as well as Turkey.

In the OSCE, we passionately believe in the importance of women's participation in political and public life. This is a prerequisite for democratic and economic development. A substantial representation of women in decision-making is essential for any country that wants to reach its full potential.

There has been progress in women's political participation over the past years. Parliaments in the OSCE area now average 26 per cent women parliamentarians. While this represents progress – in 1995, for instance, it was about 13 per cent – it is still far from the goal of gender equality.

The Presence has long promoted gender equality and worked to empower women to fully participate in Albania's public and political life. There have been notable successes. Currently, eight of Albania's 21 government members and 32 of its 140 parliamentarians are women. In 2013 the Alliance of Women Parliamentarians, was successfully re-established with the help of the OSCE Presence. The Alliance is a model of cross-party action that works diligently to empower women politically and economically. The members of the Alliance have proven that women can not only hold their own as politicians, but they can be effective, well-respected leaders and bridge political gaps.

Perhaps inspired by these examples, increasing numbers of women in Albania are taking an interest in politics and standing as candidates. The introduction of a 50% gender quota for municipal councillors in the June 2015 local elections, strongly supported by the Presence marked a great step forward and helped level the playing field for women candidates. Following the 2015 elections, Albania has over 550 women municipal councillors – 34 per cent of the total. This is a remarkable increase compared to the local elections of 2011, where women councilors constituted only 12 per cent of the total.

Many of these women councillors were trained and coached by a nationwide women's network established in 2010 by the Presence. We are working with these women to ensure that they have the skills to succeed in their new positions.

There has been significant progress throughout the entire OSCE region, but it has been slower and more uneven than many would have hoped. We are still a long way from full equality of men and women. Despite remarkable improvements in access to health and education, and greater legal rights, discrimination persists in many countries, and violence against women and girls continues. Women's rights are not only a concern for women – they

need to be embraced by male political leaders as well. No country should expect to thrive while ignoring the problems and potential contributions of half its population.

I encourage you all to share your thoughts and ideas, to learn from each other, to network and co-ordinate your efforts. In this way, you can best serve your societies and be effective promoters of change. Together, women from all parties and government levels can achieve much more than if you are working alone or in isolation from each other.

By serving as examples of strong, successful women politicians in the countries you represent you are inspiring and encouraging other women to stand as candidates, and earning the trust of your constituencies.

We in the OSCE will continue to work with you at all levels –international, national and local – to promote women’s full participation in political and public life.

Thank you.