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Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P r e s e n c e i n A l b a n i a

**Address by Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania,
at the opening of the
International Donor Conference on Disability Issues**

**Hotel Sheraton, Tirana, Albania
16 September 2004**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ten months ago I already had the pleasure to address the topic of today when we came together to discuss the first draft of the National Strategy on People with Disabilities. Since that time we went a long way together with our partners from the state institutions and civil society organisations, and with a lot of work and dedication we reached this point today.

What makes this work on disability issues so special?

First of all disability is an issue of concern to all of us and it should be a joint struggle not only for those fellow citizens with disabilities but for all of us to overcome barriers, in the physical as well as in the mental sense. This attitude should stay with us and not be forgotten after 2003, the European Year of People with Disabilities.

Secondly, the work on the National Strategy combined in a very advanced way all the efforts of the Albanian State and civil society. This was crucial for the modern stand Albania now takes by changing the definition of disability to the internationally recognised definition of the World Health Organization.

Thirdly, the united efforts of the Albanian actors attracted the international community to support this process. This is the moment to thank Mr Haack, German Commissioner of the Matters of the Disabled, and his office for the support he gave to the drafting of the strategy.

It is also time to thank the donor representatives for your presence and your interest in the projects, which are based on the priorities of the National Strategy. Again by a common effort, the projects were created to complement each other and by implementing them

facilitate a barrier-free environment for people with disabilities. This changing environment will eventually lead to full participation in all spheres of public life.

The OSCE Presence is committed to a continued support to the Albanian Government in its endeavours to provide high-quality and sustainable social services. The OSCE believes in a comprehensive society definition, which means a lively civil society including all groups of citizens.

We are very content with the co-operation we enjoyed with both the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation and we hope we can continue it until we have reached our goal of inclusion, participation and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. With reaching this goal we also make a big step forward to a vibrant and lively civil society, which is a guarantor of a free and democratic development.

I wish us all a fruitful exchange of information and discussion and hopefully the present donors will throw a favourable eye on one or the other project.

Thank you.