



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

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**Transcript of a meeting with the media of Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of
Presence, Tirana, 18 June 2004**

Ambassador Lipponen: Thank you and welcome everybody also on my behalf. We have been considering having an adequate coverage of my new appointment and provide a well-though press release. But somehow it looks like everything is leaking out with such speed that part of the media already got this information within 15 minutes from the time I had given my announcement to my people. And it is a normal habit to inform first your own people. But since a part of the media have taken again their liberties, and added their own speculations and interpretations as to why I have been nominated, why I am leaving, instead of sending out a press release the best thing is to face you all. I will first say something about the nomination and the timing. We have had a big round of nominations in the Finnish Foreign Service, but part of this round took place earlier than planned. There have been a couple of resignations in the service and this partly explains the timing. Then, this post is one of the sought-after posts in the Finnish Foreign Service and since it is bringing some additional assets to my personal life – my wife is American – this is an ideal situation. Now I am ready to answer your questions.

Shijak TV: Mr. Ambassador, was your staying in Albania difficult, considering the criticism of a part of politics towards you?

Ambassador Lipponen: This is, in a way, a personal question. With my personality, I like to have some hits, because one of the slogans I use says: “no pain, no gain”. I do not take these hits personally. They are part of your internal politics and I clearly understand that if I am a suitable scapegoat or target and if it serves the good cause, I smile and take the hit.

Albania: Who did you find easier to work or co-operate with? Was it with the majority leader or with the leader of the opposition?

Ambassador Lipponen: This is not the time to comment on it yet because, as I told my people, this is not the end. And unlike the way a part of the media have interpreted it, the main projects we are dealing with have not failed. We are working hard, negotiating, things are moving, although a bit slowly. Property restitution comes back probably to the parliament – we have already had some discussions yesterday – there is actually a very far-reaching compromise on electoral issues. We have done our work at this stage and we are waiting for the next stage. Now it is up to the parties to stand behind their words, but I believe that in the near future the parliament will start discussing the electoral issues and we have the readiness to give our aid to these discussions. With property restitution we have all the time been contributing to the parliament and if we are needed, we are here, but first of all we are already

building the readiness to support the implementation. Main consensus on the property restitution, as well as on electoral issues actually exists. There have been different explanations what the word consensus means. It does not mean hundred per cent, but, let us say, a broad majority.

Arbëria TV: Is it true that there is a critical letter sent to Vienna by the Albanian authorities regarding a contradiction to the property restitution law, apart from the public debate you have had with Mr. Ruçi? What did you discuss yesterday with Mr. Hajdaraga?

Ambassador Lipponen: I do not know anything about any such letter and even if it would exist, it would not matter. The broad majority has given their full support to our work. At the beginning of the discussions on the final draft there was a broad consensus, and what is most important, when the draft has left from the expert group chaired by us it was bearing 12 signatures, as far as I can remember. So who is to be blamed? Once again, the OSCE Presence did a really good work, but we are not the parliament, we are assisting the parliament upon the invitation of the parliament. All the decisions are done by the parliament, not by us. So, where is the responsibility?

Voice of America: You mentioned earlier that the property restitution law will probably be sent back to the parliament for re-consideration. Is that what you sense that will happen or is that what you think should happen, considering criticism towards this law for not respecting the basic principles?

Ambassador Lipponen: You are making too broad generalisations about these basic principles. There are a couple of paragraphs in the final law which are questionable. Most of the law is good, but in order that a good law gets proper implementation and the respect it needs, it should fulfil a couple of demands. And let us say that one of the principles is that there should not be contradiction within the law. But in the first paragraph as far as I remember, it is said that this law does not change or effect the following laws which are in the Addendum 1. In this addendum the first law mentioned is the Law 7501 and in our understanding the parliament changed this and gave to the State Committee competencies to make decisions which can change decisions made based on the Law 7501. Since we have been partners in the process, we have been asking for the final text, and in a normal transparent parliamentarism the text should have been immediately out. It also should have been distributed before it was voted upon in a written form to the parliamentarians, and I have regarded it as normal that since we have been so much contributing to the process to be given a copy of the text of the final law. We have been forced to read it from the newspapers, but when we will get the final text in a normal way we will give a little bit more detailed comments. I want to repeat once again that this process in general was very good, mostly very consensual, and at the final stage a couple of things perhaps did not go as they should have gone. Especially respecting the fact that in the beginning of the discussion on the law there was a broad consensus, it would have been nice if this law had had the broad majority.

Voice of America: You mean the law might go back or must go back to the parliament?

Ambassador Lipponen: The media have reported that the President has send it back already, but that is also something which is reported by the media.

Voice of America: So you are referring to what the media has reported then?

Ambassador Lipponen: There seems to be a belief among the key politicians that the President is going to return it, but I do not know where they base this.

TV Klan: At what stage are the negotiations on the electoral reform now, since you have also been criticized for secrecy of consultations you have conducted with the two major parties? Is it now with the SP or the DP?

Ambassador Lipponen: I find this criticism a little bit odd. It is normal that in diplomacy and in politics before proper negotiations start, you have to study where the major players find themselves. And if anybody has paid attention to the joint recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission, and all the back statements by the OSCE and the ODIHR, the basic line is that we have to involve the two major parties in compromises and get their backing to the possible changes of the Electoral Code. And I totally reject this kind of non-parliamentary demands that the minority in a minority should have the right to decide what is the law. The parliamentary realities have to be taken into account. We have to reach such a compromise which guarantees optimal conditions for the next year's parliamentary elections. And if neither of the major parties does not accept anymore whatever has been agreed upon and does not accept to enter into the negotiation process, the elections will take place in an atmosphere where the already strong lack of confidence would even increase. So we are doing exactly what a normal international organization and a diplomatic negotiator should be doing. And even more, our activities are also based on the acceptance and will of these two major parties, and this process, when it goes to the next stage, will involve everybody. Nothing has been decided against the rules of the parliamentarism. Since I am strongly in favour of the parliamentarism, I do not like when some people have a stand that suits them, demanding the international community to decide on behalf of your parliament against these two bad parties, which are the great majority of your parliament. Or then, when the statements of the international community or, let us say our Organization, do not please these same forces, they are showing us the door and saying they are sending letters here and there, which is plain hot air. I would like to see these letters and if they existed I would have seen them. I have the full backing from all necessary sides.

TV Klan: What is stopping the electoral reform now, the DP or the SP?

Ambassador Lipponen: I believe that both parties have political will. Still the trust and the confidence is what is needed, but I believe it is actually there. It is not my role to answer on their behalf, but things are better than what they look.

AI TV: Is your departure related with resignation on your side or is it just a reassignment?

Ambassador Lipponen: The media have invented that this is a resignation. This is not a resignation. This is a normal rotation in the Finnish system. We were prepared to have a maximum of three years, although the normal Finnish practice is to second our people only for two years. But, as I said, the rotation took place a little bit earlier and I got a really good post. So, you have to keep this in mind, from one good post to another good post. Unlike what the media or part of the media have been claiming, the record of what the Presence has done in this slightly over one and a half year is extremely impressive. I do not think we have failed in anything. We really help the parties to get on track and, as I said, these couple key processes have produced good results.

Telenorba Shqiptare: Mr. Ambassador, could you tell us something more about your relationship with the institution of the President? Has there been any confrontation between you regarding the property restitution law?

Ambassador Lipponen: None whatsoever. When it comes to the property restitution, it is the task of the parliament and the executive. We have been invited into the process by the parliament. Occasionally, there have been discussions with the President, but this is not, as far as I understand, a President's process, if we understood right the roles of the institutions. But, as I said several times, we co-operate with everybody. When it comes to the property restitution, we have been concentrating on the co-operation with the parliament.