

**INTERVIEW OF THE HEAD OF PRESENCE, AMBASSADOR EUGEN
WOLLFARTH, WITH ORA NEWS TV**

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Q: Mr Ambassador welcome!

A: It is a pleasure to be here.

Q: Let us start talking about those issues that everybody is interested to know more your recommendations as Ambassador of the OSCE Presence. It has been a difficult political year for all Albanians. I would like to hear your opinions on 2011 as you have had a busy agenda in order to make the political situation function better and that Albania fulfils those reforms that are part of the OSCE recommendations.

A: 2011 was indeed a fascinating year. The most important thing that should be kept in mind is constructiveness, building Albania, make it stronger for the future and huge headway has been made already. I had the impression that together with some partners the OSCE Presence in Albania, USA, and European Union, provided a large amount of assistance in order to come to this level of constructiveness. I am deeply convinced that it is very important to always help our Albanian partners in keeping this in mind. It is about building for the future and about achieving European integration. This is a very hard task. There is a lot to develop, a lot to be built, not only infrastructure, but also inside the human beings, such as education, but especially the attitudes of people. Here I purposely include the understanding of the political and democratic system. This is about the core values of the OSCE and about finding the common ground, common values that are democratic and human rights and rule of law orientated. And if that common package is achieved, then it is the best possible result for the economy, for investments and for jobs. That is important: a safe income in a safe environment. I think that some headway was achieved in 2011. There were some dangerous curves. It started quite roughly at the beginning of the year. Fortunately it did not stay that way. We saw the very important local government elections with wide citizen participation, with some difficulties in the counting process that need revision. That is why electoral reform is needed so much. So there are a couple of places with a lot of work needs to be done, some with a little bit of work, but, indeed, we have 2012 to come.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, do you think that the elections of 8 May, were a test that was passed successfully, keeping in mind all the problems you encountered? Even though you expressed your opinion in your report, what do you think about them some six months since then? Do you think that Albanians passed this test?

A: All those inside and outside Albania have seen the OSCE/ODIHR report on the local government elections. It was a step. Some further work needs to be done. We have the mayors and city councils now in place, who also saw what needs to be done to see progress, and finding better ways to organize things. Certainly there were some difficulties in nominating the election commissioners. Yet Election Day itself passed relatively smoothly, while the counting process clearly had had some challenges in certain areas. It went on more lengthily than was expected or needed – not least regarding the result in Tirana. All that opened some discussions for the future. So what needs to be done in the future in order that the Electoral Code provides an answer to these questions, like for example the issue of miscast ballots. These questions need to be answered in the reform process by having a level playing field for all those participating. I think its is important also to create something that is

key in all democratic societies that is trust, mutual trust and also trust in the system. The Central Elections Commission had a very difficult task in not so benevolent a climate, to organize technically very complex elections in 384 local government units. So it was a huge puzzle that had to be put together in one day with also some obstruction and some repeat elections afterwards. And if that can be organized, and I want to highlight that word - technical level it can go smoother than when the future electoral code seizes to it, then it is much better. There is also some good news to be noted. 2011 saw the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee in the Parliament to review the Electoral Code based upon OSCE/ODHIR reported guidelines and recommendations from the 2009 and 2011 elections. The Venice Commission has given its advice as well and this is a good working plan. We also offered our assistance and we are really looking forward to see results early next year.

Q: Mr Ambassador you said that mutual trust among parties is very important, also trust in the institutions and more concretely the CEC and other institutions that deal with elections. Why do you think there is a lack of trust in Albanian politics?

A: I am not a psychoanalyst. Let us take a step back. Albania was in self-destruct mode under the Enver Hoxha regime. Mistrust in the system and also mutual mistrust were, therefore, very big. I do not blame anybody that lived under the communist system mistrusting the system because it is about abuse; abuse of your own society while pretending to be doing something for the people. This is a case now Albanians first think that they have been cheated by the person on the other side. It should be the other way around. Albanians should work together, should build and do every step to regain that trust. To build up trust is not easy. That is why the OSCE and other partners are here. That is part of our name in working together, in knowing each other on a mutual level, on seeing what is needed to help build a country, a society together. Learning can only be done in a joint way, and then the trust builds up. That needs to be done and some of it we have seen also during the counting process in these mixed tables with representatives from different parties. We see it now and again in the work of the parliamentary committees. We certainly see it in civil society when people of different opinions work together and come to common solutions. This I would describe as real progress. From this, trust is built up from the bottom, but it certainly needs time.

Q: While noting that during the last months the Albanian politics has come somehow close to what you are saying. Do you think that the co-operation that is taking place among the political parties on the Electoral Code and the electoral reform is sincere one or do you think that such co-operation that has been imposed?

A: I would say it is sincere. Many people like it when they get orientation, to get orientation from their leaders, and that is only human. It is absolutely normal. Yes, I think it is sincere. I talked briefly earlier about jobs. When integrated into European structures, what do you get? You get a society, hopefully one day, based on the rule of law, human rights are, of course, self understood. With the rule of law, you would have better and hopefully prospering enterprises providing jobs. A socially controlled environment, providing hopefully multiply safe jobs to a large number of citizens and, therefore, generating wealth creation for the population at large. That is about creating greeting individual freedom. It is at least about having a decent level of income to enjoy life, to have the ability pay for health care, to pay for the education of yourself or the children. This is what human life is all about. This is a complex task and a lot of steps have been taken already in 2011. However, more is to come every year from now on! 2012, which will be a very special year for all Albanians because of the centenary, will be a hard one because every day the task to be tackled will become a little more complex. And this needs to be done as a people, as one people and identifying the common ground where to unite, where to build something. Then when it is the competition

time for election, for example to present models of how to proceed from here and where to take the next steps. The fundamental ground needs to be clear: there must be some respect for human rights, the rule of law, and democracy and then I see the best prospects for the future of Albania.

Q: You said that you are looking forward to the results of the ad hoc parliamentary committee on electoral reform. In your opinion, what should we do to have a clear Electoral Code and to have everything ready before the deadline set by the political parties expires?

A: It is not so different from other reforms that are needed but it is a very special one because it is about the prime market day for politicians - the elections. For the politicians being candidates that is probably the most nerve-racking time in their lives. They compete, they want to be elected, and they look forward to it. Political will is needed not only for winning but also for fair play it is extremely important. That is of the utmost importance. That is why the OSCE/ODIHR reports repeatedly state this. The first recommendation in the 2009 report was the establishment of greater political will. In 2011, it was exactly the same thing. So try to play fair, expect fair play, and the important thing is the media and the public, the interested public. They have a major role in it. I remember it was spectacular the climate in the room, and I still admire the people that counted, how they did it under the circumstances, with the cameras, with these reading machines, with the people counting publicly, sometimes even shouting. I mean all of a sudden there was a huge interest in what was going on, and that is needed. That is what democracy lives from. These were fantastic moments of democracy. I did not like all aspects of the counting process. Some of the counters showed up extremely late without reasonable explanation. This part of the process needs to be organized better in the future, while meticulously sticking closely to the rules. Most of the rules are good ones, are good laws and are good regulations. How they are brought to life, how they are applied, that is very often a different set of questions, and unfortunately very often the answer is not so positive.

Q: Since you brought up the question of counters, is it possible that the best solution could be to introduce electronic counting of ballots?

A: That needs to be seen. There are some risks in electronic counting. It needs also lots of investments and experience. I come from a region in Germany in which we trust more in tradition. We use very cheap paper, like newspaper paper, for our ballot papers. They are not as well developed as those you used in the local government elections here. It has to do with the mutual controls, members from different political parties working together and counting together and supervise the process, the voting process and the counting process together, so that cheating is next to impossible. And let us build on that trust which I would like to mention over and over again. Try with a little trust, build on it, and trust grows, and things can get clearer. On electronic voting, some countries have good experiences with it, so that needs to be seen. But as I said, I believe more in the traditional way: when human beings intend to work together and play fair they can do it.

Q: The ad hoc parliamentary committee on electoral reform is about to face an issue that is being pushed by some smaller parties, some of them DP allies and some others SP allies, about adding a national correction to the regional proportional system. In your opinion, is this an issue that needs to be discussed and reviewed, and can it be solved?

A: That needs certainly a political discussion, probably at a very high level when it comes to the electoral system. The focus of the ad hoc committee, if I understood correctly, should be

at this stage centering on the Electoral Code, which is a technical question on how to produce a correct picture of what voters want on Election Day, and how to produce that picture as correct as possible, and it should be as close to 100% correct as possible. As for the electoral system, this is a political question which you chose and democracy opens a wide range of possibilities. You can have proportional voting, Germany has that model, others, like Great Britain have a majoritarian system which does not give much chances to smaller political parties. It depends on what is decided here. What is important is not to have surprises or changes that come too quickly or too frequently. The last changes were undertaken in 2008. Now we are in 2011 and the next elections are due in 2013. So one should be careful and look for a large consensus when deciding to change the system again. That is a question that needs to be answered from the Albanian parties, including their leaderships, and not from the international advice because the international advice can only show which models are there in the world. The range of models is extremely wide, and all of that can be considered according to democratic rules, as fully serving democracy.

Q: There was another issue that I would like to share with you Mr. Ambassador: some smaller political parties are calling for open candidates lists. What is your opinion on this issue?

A: This is another question which is worth discussing. First, democracy allows for having closed or open lists. It needs a lot of understanding and involvement also from citizens to really profit from open lists. They need to really dedicate time in how they pick and chose the candidates. It needs a very well-educated civil society, voters that dedicate a lot of time, so it depends on how it is decided. When you have closed lists that does not mean that they are any less democratic than open lists. Having open lists will not mean that you will solve all your problems. In the case of the electoral system, I would act cautiously and try not to rush things.

Q: What does this mean: acting cautiously. More discussions, more attention...

A: Even if no changes take place in that respect right now, the next elections could be still fully democratic.

Q: Let us take our conversation beyond the electoral process. In general, it was a year that there was much discussion about the reforms and in some cases the reforms were blocked. What is your opinion about the behaviour of the Albanian politics during this year, I am not referring to one side or another, I am talking about the political spectrum in general?

A: Certainly not boring. I liked the later part much better. Let us come back to the constructiveness that is needed in decision-making, in building the common ground, Albania being part of a European village, town or city. It is very important to identify that common ground starting from the political parties. And that consensus is extremely important when it comes to European integration, especially when dealing with the European Union, because then the country needs to be in a position to be able to develop and also to deliver what is needed. And this will be very often, not only when adjustments are being done on a consensual basis for requiring the *so-called* qualified majority in the parliament which is clearly something that includes clearly that the DP and SP need to identify how they want to proceed, that is very important, and to rehearse to be able to deliver services that satisfy the wider society. This is a quality that will be mostly needed for all future integration steps. I am deeply convinced that the sides involved are able to achieve this, they are still competing, but it still needs some further rehearsing.

Q: Mr. Ambassador now we are closing in the best of ways this year. But since now, at the end of this year, there is a discussion taking place, probably it is premature but it is ongoing. And it is about the new President. On the one hand, the Socialist Party and its allies call for a consensual President, while on the other hand, the Democratic Party has clearly stated that the President will be proposed by the majority. Moreover, the current President, Mr. Topi has stated he will not compete for President. Could you provide an early opinion on this, Mr. Ambassador?

A: I have a lot of respect for President Topi. It is very helpful that he made clear that his personal plan is putting no obstacle on finding a candidate for the election of the President. It is not a parliamentary election, it is a voting procedure in the Parliament, which is a big difference. So we will not see as much campaigning. Of course, there will be some, and there is in fact some discussion on who might be the candidate. We will see. It will be very important. It could be a majority-proposed and still a consensual President. It depends at least on the personality of the one selected for candidate. What is needed, and the Constitution I believe makes it very clear, is a person that is capable in working above the party level, and giving guidance, a moral instance and more than that for the country, as the Head of State being a respectful person. This is not always easy because when it comes to saying something you also risk being criticized by anybody at all times. So, it must be someone with a stable personality, being able to cope with it, deeply convinced of the values, we also as an organisation represent, the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. I am sure that it will be possible to find a person that can do this. On the process itself, the Constitution is quite clear. The first rounds are decided by qualified majority. This makes Albania viable if there is no consensus. There is a limit and then the ruling majority decides, which is a perfectly democratic. So I do not understand some elements of the current discussion. You should put a lot of energy in really picking a good candidate capable of meeting the expectations. Being Head of State is something very special on planet earth and Albania, of course, deserves a first-class personality being able to do the job.

Q: However, following the third round the Constitution excludes the option of the consensual President.

A: It does not exclude it, but it provides an alternate voting and it will still be a majority decision. That is democratic and according to the rules. Very simple.

Q: A very important process you followed, Mr. Ambassador, is the election of the Ombudsman, which was also part of a consensus in Albanian politics that has been sought for a long time. You valued it and confirmed your support also following the election in the Parliament. Do you see it as positive ground in which consensus is being established, regardless of the different opinions on the person that was elected as ombudsman.

A: That was excellent in many respects. I would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Igli Totozani for his nomination and appointment. I would have wished that the nomination of the Ombudsman, or People's Advocate as you call it here, would have come earlier. That position has been vacant for a long time. However, that was the past. There was an offer from the majority side, from the Prime Minister, that the Socialist Party could pick the candidate. I wish that they would have chosen earlier. I liked the offer very much and that the Prime Minister was keeping his word. I also liked that the Socialist Party was having a public hearing, having the maximum level of transparency for this important process. When I looked up the Constitution, I was positively surprised to see that the Office of the Ombudsman has a really high rank in the Constitution. Transparency during that hearing was excellent and it was confirmed in the Parliament. I am very happy for the Albanian people

that they now have an Ombudsman. Of course I wish him all the best for an excellent good work for the people in Albania, they deserve it. He is certainly in a position that can help the rule of law work everyday better.

Q: The new year, 2012, starts after three days. According to you, where should the 2012 agenda be focused, taking into account Albania seeks EU candidate country status.

A: You are asking me more or less what I would give as recommendations to do next year. I would suggest working as hard as possible. The general economic situation is not extremely favourable, but looking at that and not doing anything about social development could lead to a wrong reaction. The education of the society, in schools, kindergartens, and university level is something complex which needs to be done so to achieve development in the future. A lot of work is also needed for cleaning up Albania. I do not understand why some people, and I am not talking about poor people rather about towns, are living in an environment that looks like a landfill. Why not cleaning it now and having a healthier and safer environment? Why spilling oil in the nature? Why throw plastic bags on the streets and burn tires, or do any other brainless actions, because it goes straight into our children's lungs and destroys our health. This is certainly not good and it does not cost much not to do these irresponsible things. A lot can be done without any big cost, starting from tonight, and that should be done. The other thing is that while listening to the benevolent advice from the international community, always trying to act, to work, to work hard for yourselves. The best thing Albanians can do for themselves is in building a better Albania. All the instruments are there, and it is very important to also take a close look on public officials as they work professionally, and that there is no space for corruption, so looking to what is done for the taxpayers' money, and if something is not being done correctly to report it. Also respect the state institutions. Everybody - who is not a criminal - sees the state everyday in the form of police officers in the street, respects them and also respect the ordinary citizens, to build that trust. Trust goes very well along with mutual respect. Why stopping a car in the middle of the street to send an SMS, while the traffic behind is building up behind you? All these little things make up a livable society – just behave better and respectfully and work to earn your living if you can. This is not only good for 2012 - for the next year but also good for the future, for Albania.

Q: Maybe we deal a lot with politics, and we forget the social policies which are very important for all the problems you mentioned.

A: These are very complex question because the politics has to cover social issues and some of the things I mentioned earlier; Health, pension, education all need attention and are a very important part of politics because they cost money, they are important factors for a state, for a city or town's budgets – for education, school building in a town or a city, what it is covered, as far as I know, by local government. So there is a lot to be done with taxpayers' money, and a state can only afford that when strengthening it look on economy. It is important to have a proper environment to develop the economy, as it is important also not to risk important sectors like tourism, for example, because tourists like to have a clean environment, and clean mountains, so when we walk there, for example when you walk from Valbona to Theth, which is one of the things I would like to do next year, you find trash around, that is not great. So all these little things related to social development and that need to be taken care of. The good news is that there is progress, there has been quite a lot of progress. People are more aware now. And some local officials in some regions have understood that, and they have even started separating the trash, and so on. This shows that there is progress and that it is important to spread it out into other regions. I like to see progress and see it spreading out.

Q: To consider the personal aspect – you have been very active in visiting the country, as you mentioned Valbona. What do you think of Albania? I mean its nature and history.

A: There is only one word: Fantastic.

Q: It's the end of the year. We are about to celebrate New Year's Eve, and for Albanians it is a more important tradition compared to other countries maybe. What would be your wish for Albanians and for Ora News as well, because we will be five years old in some days.

A: I mean from a professional point of view, as the OSCE Ambassador, as the Head of Presence, I wish to see the constructive climate in parliament develop even further, and having the reform agenda tackle with good contributions from all sides, all parties represented in the parliament, plus civil society from outside, to have open discussion, good solution with solid basis of common ground for European integration. And, professionally speaking, if we can be part in helping to achieve all this, we would not only be proud but also happy to do this. This is my wish list, because the reform agenda is a relatively wide one, and it is not for me to talk about the 12 priorities of European Union. Nevertheless, they are very much related with the OSCE values, the values we need to protect, and help the country bring them to life because this is to the benefit of all Albanians.

Q: And for Ora News?

A: This is a very important news channel. It is not the first time I am here. Ora News provides information, factual information to citizens, playing therefore an extremely important role in the timely delivery of facts to the general public and I wish Ora News a prosperous future and a constructive part in building Albania.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, thank you for coming tonight to Ora News. It was a pleasure to have you here to share with us and with the viewers of Ora News valuable opinions for the reform and for the prosperity of Albania in 2012.

A: Thank you very much.

Journalist: Dear friends, I believe you have received some important answers through this communication with the Head of OSCE Presence in Albania, Mr. Eugen Wollfarth, who has been an honorable guest of our studio tonight. Thank you for being with us.