

**HEAD OF PRESENCE AMBASSADOR VINCENCO DEL MONACO'S REMARKS
AT KRIIK NATIONAL CONFERENCE "CIVIL AND POLITICAL SOCIETY;
NECESSITY FOR AN INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE AND PARTICIPATION – THE
NECESSITY FOR A COMPLETE ELECTORAL REFORM; FINANCING OF THE
POLITICS"**

16 February 2022

Dear Mr. Gogo, dear Mdm. Honourable Bushka, fellow colleagues ambassadors, Prof. Fuga, friends,

Thank you for this opportunity to assess the progress of electoral reform in Albania thus far, a subject which is obviously very high on our OSCE and my own agenda, and a subject of excellent partnership and collaboration with many of you here today.

Today's conference is part of a "*permanent, real, meaningful, and inclusive dialogue*" we all strive for and conduct. And it is about trust as was mentioned a moment ago by you honourable Bushka.

Allow me to be cautiously but rationally optimistic in my assessment of where we stand: Lately we have collectively witnessed important steps in the right direction: majority and opposition jointly adopted important constitutional change and set up two important ad-hoc committees crucial under the electoral reform. This reflects the readiness of all political forces to reach agreements in the legislative arena, regardless of dissenting political discourses, which are natural, normal I would say, in any democracy. And I cannot but commend both the Speaker and Deputy Speakers of the Assembly for the way they ensure that the Assembly serves as platform for substantive and often controversial debate but with a view to find agreement, that is policies, that work for the country as a whole.

Of course, the system is not perfect, there is no perfect system on earth, and more, much more work remains to be done. The OSCE/ODIHR report on the 25 April elections identified *eleven recommendations, as you know*, pertaining to the work of the Assembly: such as the legal framework regarding the ready-made recordings submitted to TV stations by political parties to be replaced by actual journalistic coverage of electoral activities; the nationwide threshold for independent candidates; the principle of equality in form of leaders of political parties competing in several electoral districts; campaign finances and expenditures, to name just a few.

I could go on listing problem areas, but that would not be very effective, would it? I see it as our task, to advance the electoral reform, to continue to assist the Assembly in achieving results, agreements and policies. The Presence, together with our sister institution ODIHR, stands ready to support the political dialogue between parties, to provide technical assistance to the Ad-Hoc Committee, to jointly work on concrete issues such as Out-of-Country Voting, campaign financing, media in elections. And when I say jointly, I mean that comprehensively: jointly with the Assembly, political parties, you as NGOs but equally the Council of Europe, as we have until now. Time and again it has proven that when there is a will, there is a way. And there is always a technical solution to political convergence.

Reverting to the mentioned ODIHR report – you will understand that is my main compass - *seven of the recommendations* directly relate to the work of the CEC, one of our very first and very closest partners. Let me put things flatly: the CEC has been doing a commendable job! It is a fantastic partner of the Presence. Now, we need to further ensure an effective election administration, strengthened transparency, allocation of adequate time and resources, timely voter education programmes, due campaign finance oversight and more. We, my very capable team, and I stand, ready to continue to offer support on all this and more, not least in view of the 2023 local elections.

It is my and our job and mission to increase inter-institutional and inter-party dialogue and co-operation, exactly as per today's conference agenda. Enabling institutions and parties in the Assembly to raise the trust in the electoral process and increase voter participation in elections, as was also mentioned by my fellow Swiss colleague.

Trust starts in the way you set the debate. And your conference here today is one means how to start the debate on the right footing, and the right mindset.

In that sense I am grateful for the co-operation with you, with so many of you here today, be it political parties, institutions, CEC, international partners or civil society. We reciprocate with our wholehearted support and engagement. Constantly and concurrently. You may be aware that we as OSCE Presence in Albania co-ordinate the assistance of all international donors in the electoral sphere. And we are doing so also ahead of the coming by-elections. To which, by the way, I encourage from this table, this rostrum, all eligible voters to go and vote. The right to vote, the right to have a say, is one of the most fundamental democratic rights. It is where everything starts in democracy. Make use of it.

And reinforcing your message, Alastair, I would also encourage civil society organizations to register observers.

Once again thanking you for inviting me to be part of this conference, I wish you a concrete and very fruitful discussion today. Thank you!

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