



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

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN EQUALITY BODIES CONFERENCE 2018

29 October 2018

Dear Deputy Speaker,
Dear Commissioner,
Dear participants from Albania and from the region,

The topic today of today's conference, the independence of equality bodies, is of high importance.

Without independence from political control, without budgetary independence, it is difficult for equality bodies to stand up for human rights and fight against discrimination.

Independence, in that sense, refers to the ability of an equality body to:

- identify its own priorities and advocate on issues that they deem appropriate;
- make recommendations based on their own analysis, evaluation and decision;
- and to freely decide how the body uses its own budget in order to perform its role and function efficiently.

With true independence these equality bodies can be driving agents of change.

This is ever more important today, when we are see increasingly strong anti-discrimination laws being adopted by parliament, but they need implementation. We know all that this is the name of the game.

If properly implemented, these laws help to ensure that all people who are discriminated against because they belong to vulnerable group or are just weak will have legal avenues, as well as access to institutional resources, to fight this discrimination.

However, in spite of robust legislation, both in Albania and in the wider region, we still see prevalent issues of social prejudice and discrimination.

Socially marginalized groups, such as for instance the Roma, Sinti and Egyptians, but not only, still often face prejudice and discrimination at the hands of both social actors and public institutions.

But this also applies to other weak people. Just a couple of days ago, I was stepping out of my apartment block and I saw a policeman chasing away an old woman from the pedestrian walk, who was selling the products of her garden. At the same time, there was just 10 metres from him a Porsche car parking and blocking the road. In my poor Albanian, I asked him why he ignored the car and went after the old lady. His only reply was, if I correctly understood, that this is a problem. I was thinking of reading a famous book "Animal farm" – all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than the others. And a society is finally judged not by a single incident, but by the way it treats its weak members. When a society actively

perpetuates the disadvantaged status of a social group through discrimination, this reflects negatively on that society, and that applies all around the OSCE participating States.

If not properly addressed, discrimination can become socio-culturally self-enforcing, and there have been many analyses on Roma and Egyptians which show in this direction;

As such, it is our duty as to speak out against discrimination when we see it and to stand up at any time for those whose rights are not respected simply because they are more vulnerable by being perceived as different or as weak;

Any of us can be discriminated tomorrow simply by having a different opinion from the powerful, by looking differently, by dressing differently, if we do not act today against any form of discrimination against people who happen to be different.

We are all gathered here today with the same purpose, to strive for equality.

I hope that this regional conference will provide you with the opportunity to discuss the most pressing questions regarding the issue of discrimination, including the independence of equality bodies.

In doing so, we will be better placed to make the necessary changes to ensure:

- that the most vulnerable members of our society are better protected,
- that the most vulnerable are defended by adequate and functional institutions, when they are discriminated against.

Thank you very much and I wish you and this regional conference a successful, and fruitful outcome.