



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Address

**by H.E. Mr. Edmond Haxhinasto,
Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister
of the Republic of Albania,
as delivered at the 883rd meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE
Vienna, 14 October 2011**

Honorable Mr. Chairman of the Permanent Council,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by expressing my distinct pleasure and great honour to be here today and to address this unique European body for security and cooperation, and thank you Ambassador Norkus for giving me this opportunity.

May I, on behalf of the Government of Albania, also convey to you Ambassador, the deep appreciation for Lithuania's leadership at the helm of this Organization and for your commitment to advance the OSCE's mission for comprehensive and indivisible security.

Your efforts to start the implementation of our common vision of a "security community", laid down by our heads of States and Government in Astana last year, are highly valued.

Mr. Chair,

The commitment to the human dimension stands at the core of our security community. OSCE remains a beacon of hope, especially for those who suffer intolerance and discrimination. Therefore, it is within OSCE responsibility to expand its involvement and enhance these commitments.

The Arab spring is a case in point. The OSCE, with its diverse mechanisms and unique expertise, must sustain the reform process undertaken by our Mediterranean partners. I use this opportunity to congratulate the Lithuanian Chairmanship, the incoming Irish Chairmanship and neighbouring Montenegro for the successful results of the Mediterranean Conference.

Albania has welcomed the active engagement of the C-i-O and the Secretary General Zannier, whom I wish a very successful tenure, to seek concrete ways of cooperation in this direction. As a country that has transitioned from the most totalitarian dictatorship in Europe to democracy, Albania stands ready to assist our Mediterranean partners, the way it was itself assisted for the last two decades, by

sharing the experience and offering the best practices. In fact, Albania is part of the International Task Group on Tunisia, offering four Albanian Democracy Mentors that can assist the transition there. We have also replied positively to a similar request to the Head of the National Transitional Council of Libya in New York last month.

At the same time, I seize this opportunity to thank my colleague, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Spindelegger and fully support his proposal to welcome Libya as a Partner for Co-operation to the OSCE, as soon as the new Libyan authorities formulate such a request.

Finding the necessary political will to implement the provisions of the Astana Declaration remains the main challenge of the OSCE's work in the period ahead of us. The creation of a genuine security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok requires resolve, commonality of intents, contribution to resources and tangible results, starting from the forthcoming Vilnius Ministerial Council.

To this end, we support an OSCE decision on the Conflict Cycle, envisaging a stronger role for the C-I-O in the phase of early action. To our understanding this does not contradict the rule of consensus, which, however cannot be a strait jacket to impede swift OSCE response in case of crisis or conflicts.

We also stand in favour of a strategic approach to bring the VD99 in line with military realities of this century. Increasing military transparency and predictability requires lower thresholds for prior notification of military activities, more opportunities for inspections and evaluations and a more detailed military information exchange.

Commendable work has been done by OSCE in the fight against transnational threats. This work must be taken forward with additional efforts by approving the OSCE Framework on Policing and its Concept in the fight against Drugs and Chemical and Precursors. Addressing cyber threats, energy security, terrorism and proliferation of WMD to non-state actors should remain high on the OSCE agenda, as an integral part of the security community we all intend to establish.

Distinguished Ambassadors,

During the recent years Albania has gone through comprehensive institutional, social and economic reforms, and has marked noteworthy progress in its domestic as well as foreign policy agenda.

NATO's accession, a visa-free regime with the European Union and the application for the EU candidate status, stand out as some of the milestones.

Albania of today is a modern country, with functioning democratic institutions, with European laws, attractive business environment and with an active civil society. October's issue of the Forbes Magazine states that: "Today Albania has the most vibrant economy in Europe". The last European Commission's economic quarterly report affirms that "GDP growth further accelerated in Albania with 4.9%", and considers Albania "the country least affected by the economic crisis".

The Albanian economy is dynamic, and thrives in a consolidated free market, macroeconomic stability and remarkably maintaining a positive growth, despite the global economic crises.

Albania is also strongly committed to improve the economic environment, by conducting sound regulatory and fiscal reforms. Over 2/3 of permits and licenses have been abolished, and the remaining 64 are grouped in a One-Stop-Shop -The National Licensing Center. This reform has reduced the time for issuing licenses up to 6 times, diminishing drastically its relevant costs.

The tax and customs system were thoroughly reformed – having today one of the lowest flat taxes in Europe. The country's increase of the competitiveness was reflected in the substantial increase of exports. The public expenditure was oriented, mainly, on road and utilities infrastructure affecting the quality of the life of the people. The tourist potential, although partially exploited, is also extraordinary. Last year Albania faced the highest tourist influx ever in its history, as we hosted about 3.5 million tourists.

On the institutional front, reforms have been guided towards smaller, more efficient government. We have introduced 100 % electronic procurement and have objective to rank among first in the world as far as e-governance and internet penetration are concerned.

The last May local elections noted that the fundamental standards of free and fair elections on transparency and competition, were met.

We are thankful to the ODIHR for deploying a large Election Observation Mission and to the participating States for seconding hundreds of short-term observers to monitor these elections.

The GoA intends to carry out a comprehensive electoral reform that meets the recommendations of the 2009 and 2011 ODIHR reports, involving the ODIHR and Venice Commission expertise. This reform is also a key priority in the EU set of obligations for approaching further to this organization.

On the international front, Albania is an active contributor to the regional and international organizations it is a member, starting from the region of the Western Balkans, to ISAF in Afghanistan where we are increasing our contribution from 307 support and combat troops, to training the Afghan police forces.

Mr. Chair,

The OSCE and its Presence in Albania have and will continue to play an important role in supporting the country's reforms. Property reform, demilitarization, support for civil society, election and judicial reform are some of the areas where Albania benefits from the OSCE.

The Presence activities are carried out in full compliance with the mandate entrusted by the Permanent Council and with the strategic priorities set forth by the Government of Albania. We are pleased to see that the Presence continues its close cooperation with the Albanian authorities, seeking concrete ways that the relevant Albanian authorities gradually take over the responsibilities in the areas

where the country has made tangible progress. These reforms are fully compliant with those that further the country's EU integration agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Albania will continue to play a very constructive role in the Balkans. We are pleased to see that the region has marked remarkable progress towards stability and development, while bilateral relations have had a positive trend. Independence of Kosova has unquestionably enhanced these parameters.

A new page has been turned in the Western Balkans after Kosova's independence and the opinion by the ICJ that it did not violate any international law. Today, Kosova's independence is recognized by 85 UN member States. Today there is an opportunity for Serbs and Kosova Albanians alike to shed the past behind. Things are not easy, but they are not impossible, either, if they adopt the vision of a shared future in the European Union, rather than that of the divisive past.

It is in this spirit that Albania fully supports the EU-facilitated technical dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia as two sovereign and independent neighbouring countries.

EU integration process is not a panacea for all the pending issues of the region, but it is the only process that can enshrine values and ensure a perspective to resolving them in a peaceful and civilized way.

We are pleased to see that the latest EU enlargement strategy gives Serbia the candidate status, and Kosova the opportunity of a roadmap for the visa liberalization. It is crucial that none is left behind in the region.

It is in this context that we strongly reject any hidden agendas envisaging the partition of Kosovo or swapping of territories.

At the same time, we support the steps taken by the Government of Kosovo, in close coordination with KFOR and EULEX, to end the reign of lawlessness, smuggling and trafficking in the north and establish the rule of law.

We believe that with determination and courage, nothing can or should stand on the way of the legitimate efforts of a sovereign state to establish a democratic and multiethnic society.

Mr. Chair,

Despite the overall progress of the region, few challenges still remain: In strengthening the bilateral relations, enhancing the regional cooperation on the basis of the principle of all-inclusiveness, and in reinforcing the integration processes, into Nato and EU.

Albania has been and remains a serious partner in all these three dimensions and believes that the region needs to mark further progress in integrating within itself, with quality infrastructure (transport, communication and energy), removing all

non-physical barriers, introducing free movement of people as well as with better cooperation in combating crime, corruption and illicit trafficking.

The countries of the region should continue to work together to improve its image and present itself as an attractive integrated market to the world. We have to become competitive as a region, for motives other than security, and I believe, all the potentials are there.

The reforms needed are not only to the best interest of the region and its citizens, but at the same time key prerequisites to accelerate the European Integration process. However, this progress would be unfulfilled if we were to underestimate OSCE which is key partner in the consolidation of peace, stability and democracy in the Western Balkans.

It is in the best interest of our Governments and people to make full use of the OSCE's field presence in the region and its independent institutions of the Human Dimension to further reforms, which are being undertaken at a national level.

It is understandable that the small and lean budget of our Organization cannot be immune from the effects of the ongoing global economic crisis. Thus it is essential that the OSCE field operations in the Western Balkans focus their projects in strategic areas and gradually hand over residual activities to the host countries.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude by briefly dwelling upon Albania's OSCE agenda. Our priorities in this Organization aim at boosting Albania's engagement in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination.

The social fabric of Albania and Albanians revolves around the principles of religious harmony, multicultural understanding, toleration and acceptance. These are among the main distinguishing features of our society and are deeply entrenched in our ancient and modern history. It is, therefore, only natural to share this dimension with the other peoples and nations in the OSCE space and beyond.

In this respect, we intend to host the next high level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in the year 2013, in Albania. We believe that Albania is one of the countries that fully meets these requirements and represents a proper venue to host the next meeting. We are ready to work with other interested countries and the Secretariat to make it happen.

We also believe that such a unique heritage will help Albania build bridges, promote trust, and foster greater understanding within the OSCE area. We can best achieve this goal by taking the helm of this Organization in the near future, when conditions are ripe and consensus of all participating states is at hand.

Albania has demonstrated that it can take the lead in working for peace and security in a historically difficult region as the Western Balkans. We are confident that we can successfully deliver also at a larger and more challenging scale.

Finally, **Mr. Chair**, I would like to conclude by congratulating Ireland and Ukraine for the assumption of the Chairmanship-in-office in the two forthcoming years. I wish them every success in the challenging task of steering the world largest regional Organization.

We will strongly support your work and closely cooperate with you in implementing the priorities of your respective Chairmanships and addressing challenges that stand in the way of fulfilling a genuine security community.

I thank you all for your kind attention!