



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

Remarks of the Head of Presence

National Conference of the People's Advocate

Tirana,

Hotel Tirana International

11 December 2018

Dear People's Advocate, dear panellists, dear audience, friends and colleagues,

It is an honour and a pleasure to be invited to speak here today at this annual conference.

You mentioned that I have been here before for quite some time. When I came for the first time to Albania in the mid-1990s, the founding of something like the People's Advocate was a remote dream. Control of power, checks and balances were at an infant state and very much underdeveloped. Institutionalized observance and defence of human rights were far from the agenda.

Only a short time later it got worse. In 1997, the Albanian State collapsed, I was then working on Albania in Germany, and citizens were left to fend for themselves the way they could. Once again, individual escape was the word of the day and physical survival that was more pressing than the observance of human rights.

Ever since then though, Albania has made important political, economic and social progress, also in the field of human rights. Was it fast enough? That's a matter of serious debate. Is the glass half full or half empty? I would not try to give a reply here; that would explode the frame. But I am sure that the justice reform gives the glass another important shot to put it that way. The OSCE Presence, as the People's Advocate mentioned, has provided substantive support along the way, actively promoting the Human Rights agenda according to its mandate. We are proudly still supporting the country in the field of defending human rights.

We are delighted to see that today the People's Advocate provides an invaluable service to Albania's society: you ensure that the constitutional rights are respected, you are working on that; also, you are advancing the human rights agenda in line with the country's international obligations. This is an enormous task and a high responsibility on your shoulders.

We are proud that we played over the years a firmly supporting role for the setting up of People's Advocate office through the development of bylaws, training and other activities.

As this institution is a landmark for a functional democracy, there is still an important part to follow: people have to learn more about the People's Advocate, know what the Advocate can do for them. You can explain what you can do for them so that all Albanians know how they can take up their grievances with you if their rights are not respected by public institutions.

Unfortunately, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament has left, because the next sentence was mostly addressed to her. In return, I urge the other elements of Albania's democracy to give proper attention and support to the People's Advocate, and in particular attention. Too many of the special reports by the People's Advocate do not get the attention they should in the Assembly – including, earlier this year, the one on the expropriation of property. The People's Advocate can make a positive contribution to the health and reputation of Albania's democracy, if the institution is allowed to.

I hope this conference will generate impetus to take the office of the People's Advocate forward in that sense. I wish you a successful conference and thank you for your attention!