



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

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS - "THE EUROPEAN ELECTORAL  
HERITAGE: TEN YEARS OF THE CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE  
IN ELECTORAL MATTERS" CONFERENCE**

*2 July 2012*

Madam Speaker,  
Distinguished Professor Velaers,  
Chairman Ristani,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Good morning.

Taking the floor on behalf of the OSCE Presence in Albania at the opening of this timely and relevant conference to mark the 10th anniversary of the *Code of Good Practices in Electoral Matters* fills me with great professional satisfaction.

I congratulate the Albanian authorities and the Council of Europe/Venice Commission for organizing such an important event here in Tirana.

Let me come straight to the point:

Free and fair elections provide any modern democratic society with fundamental legitimacy.

Through their physical participation on Election Day, voters are able to freely express their political will as to who should represent them and approve legislation and hold the government of the day to account.

In the Europe of 2012, the proper conduct of elections is clearly one key benchmark of a country's democratic legitimacy and level of national progress.

Investment in holding free and fair elections is also an investment in a country's political stability and social peace.

The area of elections remains an important area of partnership between the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Indeed, a partnership that the Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe aspires to enhance further.

The Council of Europe, through the Venice Commission, and the OSCE/ODIHR have a long and proud tradition of close co-operation, which combines both electoral assistance and election observation.

As we know, their Joint Opinions on specific pieces of domestic electoral legislation have helped many countries to draft and implement their electoral laws in line with the principles

laid out in the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practices in Electoral Matters and also the OSCE's Copenhagen Document.

In this regard, the Code, adopted by the Venice Commission in 2002, constitutes a key strategic document in recognising universal, equal, free, secret, direct and periodical elections as the main features for all modern mature democracies.

The Code has successfully assisted in harmonising countries' electoral laws in line with international standards and in establishing better election administration procedures.

This neatly brings me to the issue of Electoral Code reform in Albania where the OSCE, Presence in Albania has laid strong emphasis on full compliance with all international electoral standards.

It is important to say that major work has been carried out so far by the Albanian Assembly.

The finishing line is in reach - but only for those with political will.

However, any finally agreed reform should seek the widest political consensus possible and should be able to last the test of time.

A successful outcome of the reform needs to be followed by the full and honest implementation of a new electoral law, would make a tangible contribution to Albania's ongoing reform agenda and also its long term international aspirations.

That is why political leaders need to swiftly come to an agreement based on a high quality product covering *all* the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.

I think I should also say that a timely conclusion of the reform is also required so that the Central Election Commission can have enough time to efficiently and effectively carry out the relevant preparations.

Accomplishing this task requires, above all, political leaders to cast aside partisan self interest, to put their country first and to honour the trust placed in them by the Albanian citizens.

In this regard, I think the first recommendation from the 2009 and 2011 OSCE/ODIHR Final Election Observation Mission Reports says it all:

“Parties should demonstrate the political will for the conduct of democratic elections commensurate with the broad privileges they enjoy under the law in regard to the conduct of elections. They should discharge their electoral duties in a responsible manner for the general interest of Albania.”

We have yet to see whether the political leaders of this country will be guided by a wider sense of responsibility towards the citizens and the well-being of the whole country.

How long can Albania wait?

I am confident that the citizens of this country can provide the answer.

In mature democracies, civil society, including the media, add to the system of making up opinions leading to important developments and conclusions, adding to a functional system of checks and balances.

Responsibility must lie in this sovereign country's institutions.

Responsibility must lie in the political will and sound judgement of its political leaders.

Responsibility must also lie in civil society also playing its full part in pushing forward change.

Madam Speaker,  
Professor Velaers,  
Chairman Ristani,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by again congratulating the organizers of this event and let me also reiterate that the OSCE Presence in Albania remains committed, together with our international partners, in assisting the Albanian authorities along the path way of reform.

I wish all participants a very successful conference.

Thank you very much.

**Ends**