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**REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

***Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of  
Albania, H.E. Mr. Besnik Mustafaj***

***656<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Permanent Council of OSCE  
Vienna, 8 March 2007***

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

### **General considerations**

Let me start by expressing my double pleasure for being here at the OSCE Permanent Council, OSCE's principal OSCE Forum that is permanently in session during the year. Firstly, let me take this opportunity to express gratitude for the important role the OSCE has always played in promoting the fundamental values, peace and stability in Europe. Secondly, by addressing this Council of participating States of this pan-European and, I would also say Euro-Atlantic, organization, I am offered the opportunity to present our work in achieving the two main goals of Albania's foreign policy: membership in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

Removal of dividing lines among states, building bridges among them, confidence and security building measures, arms control and disarmament, conflict prevention and resolution, promotion and respect for human rights, promotion of tolerance and respect, the fall of dictatorial regimes etc., could not have been achieved without the valuable contribution of the OSCE. We are very much aware of this.

Given the very specific nature and role of the OSCE, it is one of the important organizations where Albania is member and has focused attention of its foreign policy. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to re-iterate our commitments to reinforce its work, to enhance its role and efficiency in the face of the challenges of the modern world and the continent where the OSCE is operating.

The positive cooperation between Albania and the OSCE, particularly in the last ten years, has been associated by mutual and somewhat specific relations. The OSCE experience and contribution to the consolidation of institutions and strengthening democracy in Albania have been welcomed. Meanwhile, Albania's progress and its constructive role in the region have been appreciated and assessed as necessary also for the Organization.

In overcoming the obstacles Albania has encountered in its path of transition, in facing the current and future challenges and in

progressing further ahead, the Albanian authorities have had and will continue to maintain close relations with the OSCE and its participating states. At the same time, let me underline also that Albania's contribution has been and will always be present in further improving the OSCE's functionality and effectiveness.

This valuable experience, the adoption at the Brussels Ministerial of a number of decisions in strengthening OSCE's effectiveness and in establishing new structures, as well as the guiding principles of the Spanish OSCE Chairmanship, represent a solid basis for the accomplishment of the Organization's mission and our common objectives.

### **Progress in achieving Albania's objectives**

I would like to share with you some of the most recent achievements in Albania. The signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU is one of the most significant achievements for the progress and international affirmation of Albania. This is a substantial document to rely and work upon in moving ahead with complex reforms. The implementation of the latter will ensure, in a few years, the country's overall transformation and the fulfillment of all the required standards for EU integration. Let me take this opportunity to thank three EU countries, Latvia, Slovenia and Slovakia and their parliaments for having already ratified the above-mentioned Agreement. This Agreement and its implementation will provide even greater impetus and energies to our country to move at a faster pace ahead and to pursue the fulfillment of the OSCE mandate.

The will to join the Euro-Atlantic family has raised before Albania, its Government and the entire Albanian society, a high sense of obligation and responsibility for the intensification of work to ensure that Albania will reach the required standards and be worthy of receiving membership invitation, beginning with NATO, at the upcoming Enlargement Summit of 2008. We are aware that this could be achieved by deepening and consolidating reforms, particularly strengthening the rule of law, consolidating and enhancing the efficiency of the public administration, fighting organized crime and corruption, carrying forward defense reforms, etc. Albania is highly committed in all these respects.

More specifically, during the last 18 governing months, very significant results have been achieved in the fight, with zero tolerance, against corruption, organized crime and trafficking. The most powerful Albanian criminal groups have been most severely as never before, their heads and hundreds of members have been rounded up and brought to justice, at home and abroad, in close cooperation with the law enforcement agencies of other countries.

A 3-year moratorium, other legal and institutional measures, awareness measures with most affected communities as well as measures to rehabilitate victims of trafficking, have considerably reduced illegal trafficking by sea to Italy and then to Europe.

Notable achievements and successes achieved in the fight against corruption in the customs, in tax collection and public procurement and in the fight against economic informality have ensured a substantial increase in budget revenues despite a considerable reduction of duties during the same period.

Further strengthening the rule of law remains an absolute priority. The Albanian Government is aware that the necessary reforms in the judicial system, the electoral system and the fight against corruption and crime, require broad consensus by all political forces and the whole Albanian society. Convinced that the progress of Albania towards its integration to the European and Euro-Atlantic structures is, first and foremost, a major all-inclusive project of strategic significance for Albania, its people and nation, that exceeds any ideological barrier or individual interest of various political groupings, the Government and its ruling majority remain open and willing to cooperate, in a constructive way, with all political forces for the Euro-Atlantic future of Albania. Consensus and a constructive cooperation are and remain the sole response of the Albanian Government as long as this is called for by major national interests.

### **Local Election**

Mr. Chairman, aware that local elections in Albania were discussed at the PC as a special subtopic under current issues last week, let me just touch very briefly on it.

The Albanian authorities appreciate the correct spirit of the ODIHR report. This is also conveyed in the description of the electoral process bringing to evidence, inter alia, that the voters' lists had improved compared to those in 2005; the police acted in a correct professional way during the voting process; there were no attempts on the part of the Government to deviate the voting process, and the people voted freely.

While positively assessing the OSCE/ODIHR's work, report and recommendations, the Albanian Government has thus seriously undertaken to implement the relevant recommendations. The Final report will be considered with the same degree of seriousness.

Let me emphasize, following some polemics caused after the publication of the preliminary report, that the process of Albania's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures will only move ahead.

Since I have no small experience in journalism, it has occurred to me to come across cases when the title of an article is not in full harmony with its substance.

### **Cooperation with the OSCE Presence in Albania**

In 1997, the Permanent Council decided, upon the request of the Albanian Government, to send an OSCE Presence in Albania to help overcome the crises and take the country to general elections, in line with the OSCE commitments. In a second stage after that, this Presence was re-installed with an enhanced mandate, to include monitoring of the north-eastern borders of the country.

For a period of six years, the Presence has helped Albania through its expertise in a number of fields and according to its mandate, and has reported on the developments at home, including implementation of OSCE commitments. This assistance was focused on legislation on the rule of law and democratic institutions, electoral reform, freedom of the media and civil society, the situation in the north-eastern borders of the country, the political life in the country and other issues. All are familiar with the flow of this cooperation.

At a later stage, which is also the current one, an updating of the mandate was agreed in 2003 in order to better reflecting the

developments and progress of the situation at home. I would say that now, Albania is gradually entering another new phase, that of a partnership in priorities that are also part of the European Partnership of Albania. These are major priorities of the Government. This new phase requires, therefore, a qualitatively different and focused partnership.

A more harmonized balance between the needs and priorities of the host countries and the adjustment of assistance in that line and according to the implementation capacities of the Organization, would have its impact in focusing the provision of experience and expertise, rendering it more efficient and ensuring the country gradually takes on in its hands the ownership of the process.

There is an increasing understanding between the Government and the OSCE Presence on the tasks to be fulfilled this year and those remaining to be completed for a few more years. As one of the countries that has benefited first-hand from close relations and cooperation with the OSCE, Albania would also have the privilege of proposing how and where such a cooperation could be concretely focused in the future.

We would be happy if the progress achieved in a number of fields, and if that balance, as mentioned above, including highlighting a greater maturity of the domestic institutional framework, would have been part of the constant reporting by the Presence. I am convinced, however, that the Presence and the Government will be in a position to join efforts to focus the activities more on truly major priority fields for the country, and close up those portfolios where a satisfactory level has been reached and work could be carried out effectively by the country's institutions.

The focus could continue on strengthening the rule of law, specifically the judiciary, the completion of a modern full electoral package within a well defined timeframe, and certain major aspects related to good governance.

In this light, a strategy of gradually reducing the competences of the Presence and shifting them to local staff and institutions should be considered as a success for the country and for the Organization in fulfilling its mandate. We are ready and would welcome a timely start of cooperation in this respect.

## **Cooperation with the neighbors**

The close and intensive cooperation with our neighbors is a high priority for Albania. It ensures stability and prosperity for South-Eastern Europe. Albania is very aware and sensitive to that. It has contributed in a very constructive way to such a cooperation, stability and prosperity. It views it as a greater impetus for a larger and faster rapprochement towards its Euro-Atlantic integration.

In the framework of OSCE's activities and the initiatives of other regional and sub-regional organizations, Albania has maintained a close cooperation with its neighbors, in several fields of mutual benefit, d.g., the fight against trafficking in human beings and drugs, border management and security, arms control and disarmament, in the field of trade and tourism, economy and banking etc. Albania will stick to this active policy in the South-Eastern European activities and will promote, with all its potentials, stability and prosperity in the region which can be currently considered as an area of good cooperation.

In the bilateral field with its neighbors Albania is likewise committed with an equally great and special seriousness. I would like in particular to mention the very good relations with Croatia and Macedonia, with which we also have a joint Partnership Charter for our NATO membership, with Bosnia and Montenegro, and in particular also with EU and NATO member states. Constant improvements have marked relations with Serbia. We are convinced that they will register even greater progress in the future and we will continue to do our best for it.

## **Kosova**

The rich experience that the OSCE has accumulated to the benefit of a functional democracy is a valuable asset which should be preserved. We are convinced that it will contribute to the role the OSCE will be asked to play in Kosova after the settlement of its final status. We support the work done hitherto and the continuation of its role. The strengthening of functional capacities of Kosova institutions, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the implementation of decisions due to be reached on Kosovo are preconditions that will pave the way for Kosova's European development.

While appraising the role of President Ahtisaari as the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General on the Kosova Status Process, we are convinced that the final document to be submitted soon to the UN SG and the Security Council would refer to a status in conformity with the aspirations of Kosovo people for a free, independent, democratic, fully functional and multiethnic country, a new state with its own symbols and institutions, the right to join international organizations, including UN, where the minority rights and freedoms are observed and guaranteed by laws and institutions.

Albania believes that the settlement of the Kosova status will be turned, thanks to the contribution of the Kosovar citizens, the international community and the countries of the region, into a genuine accord of peace and stability not only for Kosovo but for the whole region and beyond.

Albania believes that the status settlement should not be delayed. It ought to be politically and legally clear, such as to guarantee not only Kosova's territorial integrity, but also the functional integrity of its institutions at all levels.

We have encouraged all parties to the negotiations on the final status, including the Serbian side and community, and other Kosova minorities and the entire public opinion, to support Ahtisaari's proposal, to closely cooperate with him and his team for the remaining period and to contribute to its accomplishment. The Albanian side is committed to a very active and constructive participation in all this process, until its final conclusion.

### **Albania's bid for OSCE Chairmanship**

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, it is in the light of the above, the implementation by Albania of its commitments, the progress hitherto and the expected progress in the coming years, that Albania has viewed the submission of its candidacy for the assumption of the OSCE Chairmanship in 2012. Its expected consent by the OSCE participating states will ensure that, for the first time ever, the Chairmanship will be held by a Western Balkans country. This



Chairmanship will be a demonstration not only of the increased contributing capacities of a country that has cooperated, has been assisted and has benefited from OSCE, but also an additional possibility for the promotion of the values and interests of the region itself.

In addition, the rich experience of our country in a very active participation at all OSCE forums and activities, the Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Cooperation, the chairing of most of the regional initiatives, membership in ECOSOC, membership in the IAEA Board of Governors for the year 2007–2009, etc., are only some examples that speak for our good and ever increasing capacities in successfully delivering the task of Chairmanship, just as it would be expected from the OSCE participating states. Albania would thus substantially contribute to the further strengthening of the credibility, reliability, role and work of the Organization in achieving our common goals.

While believing that in my address I could not satisfy your overall interests on the developments and my country and its role in the region, I remain open for questions which you wish to raise.

Thank you!