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PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
TO THE INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS
VIENNA

Vienna, July 27th, 2005

To the attention of all OSCE delegations

For the benefit of informing the delegations of the OSCE participating states, please find attached an unofficial English translation of an article on the OSCE, published recently by the largest independent daily newspaper in Albania, “Koha Jonë”, on July 25th, 2005.

This article represents the views of the Albanian opinion-makers and therefore it does not represent the views of the Albanian Government.

The OSCE at the crossroad

by Agron Alibali

1 August 2005 marks the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. During this period, the OSCE has played an important role in the continent. Its three dimensions, the politico-military, the economic and environmental, as well as the human dimension, were generally an important step towards constructive dialogue and the resolution of various problems among the participating states in a Europe divided in half by the Cold War.

The OSCE crisis

Today, however, the OSCE is undergoing an unprecedented crisis. The crisis came into the open when, at the end last year, consensus was not reached on the approval of the organization's budget. However, the signs had been given before, as well, especially after direct criticisms by a number of participating states.

The crisis came into light, for example, also in the lowering of the representation level in the annual meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in the difficulties that are felt in the functioning of the Permanent Council, as a consequence of in-bloc-position of the EU ambassadors, in the "double standards" that are claimed to be observed regarding elections and their monitoring "West of Vienna" compared to the countries "East of Vienna", etc.

These criticisms have been taken very seriously, especially by the current Chairman-in-Office, the Foreign Minister of Slovenia, Dr. Dimitrij Rupel. In order to analyze the situation created and to give opinions on its reform, Dr. Rupel appointed a Group of Eminent Persons. A parallel group of experts for the same purpose was also appointed by the Parliamentary Assembly. Presently, both reports were handed over to the participating states for examination, and they can as well be freely found on the Worldwide Network (internet).

The reports present important proposals for the institutional strengthening of the organization, for the reforming of the field missions, as well as for the need of a cross-dimensional approach to its three main dimensions.

The OSCE and Albania

Since becoming a "participating" state of the CSCE in 1990, Albania has played its role as an equal in the "Conference" that later turned into an "Organization". Things changed in 1997 when the government invited the OSCE to establish a "Presence" and to help resolving the crisis. Although the mandate was initially broad, it was apparent that the Presence would have a limited stay in time, and that the normalization of the situation

would also bring the closure of the Presence and its departure from the country. This would make possible that Albania, as an equal “participating state”, would “add to the values” of the organization by using also the experience gained during its direct and close cooperation with the OSCE.

The Kosovo crisis and the amelioration of the situation throughout the region – and especially in Albania – created the hope that the Presence would leave around the year 2000. But after almost eight years, the Presence does not at all hide its plans to immortalize its stay in the country.

In the meantime, the two above mentioned reports give a series of important recommendations for the work of field missions, of which some might not be seen with a positive eye from the leadership of the Presence in Tirana, due to the fact that these recommendations limit in space and time their up-to-date activity.

One of the most important recommendations is that “the mandates must ensure that the objectives of the mission are clear and agreed between the OSCE and the host State”. It is therefore understood that in the future there will be no more vague and general objectives that can be drafted with the purpose to extend indefinitely the life of the Presence. And most importantly, Albania will have a decisive role in defining the mandate, the objectives and the time-frame, contrary to what might desire the actual Head of the Presence, who declared not long ago, that this aspect depends also “from the political will of the 55 participating states”. He said during his first press conference in November 2004: “I emphasize we are here because the 55 participating states, including Albania, have wanted us to be here and we will help for as long as we will be needed and wanted.”

Well, it is more than clear that the overwhelming majority of the public opinion in Albania considers the Presence and its mission as already exhausted. Harsh criticism for the role and the work of the Presence has appeared so often and from so many directions, that this would be enough for a responsible presence to take them seriously and to reflect by at least shutting down the unnecessary Political Office and the Regional Offices.

Failures and Scandals

Moreover, the quality of the work of the Presence in many of the “mandate’s objectives” has left a lot to be desired. It is enough to mention three Electoral Codes in 5 years, created with the help of or entirely from the OSCE and ODIHR, which are very difficult not to be called pure failures.

Even the last Electoral Code, a product of the OSCE and ODIHR imposed on the Albanians with an incredible arrogance, is such that even today, almost three weeks after the 3rd of July, is not yet officially known who has won the elections?!

Of course we are not mentioning here the Constitution, drafted primarily by the OSCE Presence, which is nothing else but a document that codifies the political instability in the country and which weakens the basic prerogatives of a sovereign state.

But the greatest up-to-the-moment scandal of the Presence's work was the February 2005 proposal for the fabrication of a Greek ethnic enclave in Toskëri (*Southern Albania*), intentionally presented as being in accordance with some mysterious international "standards". Although this version was rejected, the Presence still "arranged" for the "B version" to pass, meaning Bregu (*the Coastal Region*), including the village Himarë and others, to be detached from Labëria and Vlora, and be attached to the Delvina electoral zone, in whose districts there are some villages of the Greek minority.

Not without any substance, a daily Greek newspaper praised recently "the able Greek diplomats" in achieving the objectives of "Hellenism" in Albania. It is unbelievable that the Presence involves itself in such adventures which are contrary to the Charter of the Organization, as well as to the vital interests and to the security of a sovereign country...

Another scandal was the unfair pressure that the Presence exercised towards the Albanian Government in order to accept the new electoral map, by engaging the highest structures of a third organization such as the EU, and by also bypassing the Permanent Council of the OSCE. By not accepting their own responsibility for the failure of the electoral reform in the country, now it seems that the OSCE and ODIHR are tending to impose on the country the so-called "proportional regional system" which is nothing else than a step towards the cantoning of the country, and as such it should be decisively rejected by the Government, the Albanian politics and the public opinion.

The future of the Presence in Albania

While understanding the desire of the Presence's leadership to extend their stay on the Mediterranean shores, as well as their tendency to see the country through dark glasses – take a look, for example, at Ambassador Vacek's interview with the Voice of America on July 4th 2005 – it is anyway clear that the days of the Presence in Albania are counted. Due to this, it would be better that the Presence itself comes out with a series of proposals for reducing its staff towards the approaching closure of the mission. As such, a first step would be the withdrawal of the Ambassador and the temporary heading of the Presence from one of the Troika Ambassadors resident in Tirana. This would save funds and would give an end once and for all to the non-diplomatic and often undesired protagonism of the Heads of Presence. Another indispensable step would be the immediate closure of the Political Office, as one of the most parasite branches of the Presence and as one of the sources of the negative publicity that is imposed on Albania. The third step would be the closure of the regional offices and the general reduction of the OSCE personnel to a maximum of 15 people. In reality, it doesn't make sense that a similar organization such as the Council of Europe maintains in the country an office of 3 people, while the OSCE maintains a personnel about 40 times larger in number. If the Presence does not undertake these steps on its own, then the new Government should not hesitate at all to act.

A critical and constructive thinking towards the OSCE Presence in Albania is the only realistic and necessary approach for the reformation and the rescuing of the organization

from the cross-road where it finds itself today. The ostrich complex, often displayed through the endless boasting on “talent” or “added values”, only creates the wrong perception that the Presence is bullet-proofed from criticism and immunized from deficiencies. If Brussels, for example, really thinks that the OSCE Presence in Tirana is perfect, then it is free to use its “expertise” for solving the EU crisis after the referendums in France and the Netherlands.

Just as a private company would not survive in the global market without increasing its efficiency, without shutting down parasite and failed branches, and laying off personnel, the OSCE, too, as an international organization, would have it difficult to reform without understanding and accepting failures of its own work in Albania. Albania is no longer like the 1997 country, and Albanians are fully able to walk on their own feet. While not negating the positive assistance of the Presence up to the year 2000, as well as the sincere contribution of an important number of its personnel, still it cannot be negated that the Presence has *de facto* become into a joke of the international community in a sovereign country, and a meaningful obstacle to Albania’s objectives in the framework of Euro-Atlantic integration. Therefore, there is no more sense and reason that the mandate of the Presence in Albania be postponed beyond the end of the year 2005.