



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Albanian Foreign Minister Islami

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 26, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We too very warmly welcome Minister Islami to the Permanent Council today.

Mr. Minister, as you yourself have just pointed out your presence, like that of two other Foreign Ministers from the region who have appeared here in recent weeks, clearly reflects the importance your country places on the work of the OSCE.

And we commend, Mr. Minister, your emphasis on pursuing critical reforms, and in particular on the importance of real implementation of reforms, to strengthen the rule of law and the economic situation. Achieving genuine reform goes beyond not just a commitment on paper or in rhetoric.

For example, the right to hold peaceful demonstrations is a fundamental democratic principal. Our 1990 OSCE Copenhagen commitments guarantee the right to peaceful assembly and demonstration.

The February 20 demonstration in Tirana was exactly in line with those commitments. It was peaceful, and the Albanian government allowed demonstrators to air their views while also ensuring safety. Demonstration leaders likewise kept the atmosphere calm and non-violent. This was a significant major improvement over the violent February 7 demonstrations, and a major step forward for Albanian democracy.

We note that the recent municipal elections showed improvements over past elections. We believe that the OSCE Presence and ODIHR will continue to provide vital assistance in further improving the electoral code and procedures.

We note the Minister's emphasis on combating trafficking in persons as well. Indeed, Albania has put a great deal of effort into this cause and has made notable progress as a result. In this regard, we strongly support the Anti-Trafficking Center in Vlore as well as Albania's continued cooperation with the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative Center's regional anti-trafficking operations. The fight against trafficking must be sustained, and we all need to continue our efforts. We are pleased that Albania is also deeply committed to fighting this international scourge.

We also strongly support Albania's work to reform the judicial system and to fight organized crime. This, of course, goes hand in hand with the fight against corruption, which, as the Minister himself has noted, is one of his government's top priorities. Without effectively combating corruption, there can be no sustained progress on promoting economic development and the rule of law. We support the work of the OSCE Presence in assisting the Government of Albania in its work to curb corruption and strengthen rule of law.

Once again Mr. Chairman, I should like to thank Minister Islami for coming here to Vienna and for appearing before us today in the Permanent Council. Mr. Minister, you should know that you are well and ably represented by Ambassador Mazi and his team with whom we work closely and cooperatively. And that you have our full support as your government implements essential reforms to ensure that Albania continues on its path of development and Euro-Atlantic integration.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.