



From Head of OSCE Presence in Albania

Dear readers, dear friends,

In the name of the whole staff of OSCE Presence in Albania, I wish you a Happy New Year!

As reflected in this fourth issue of our Newsletter, the Presence has been very active in 2024 in all the fields covered by its mandate. 2025 will be another active year, notably because it is an electoral year, a domain where OSCE support is particularly expected.

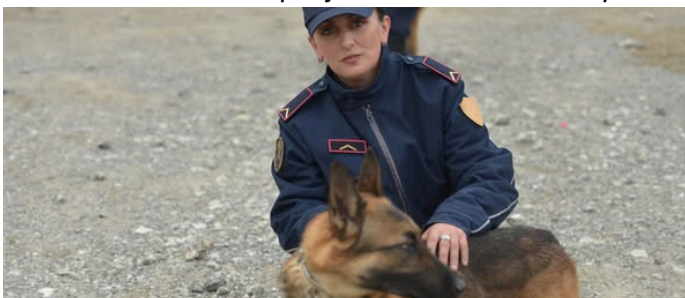
While celebrating OSCE's 50th anniversary all year long, we will also focus more on our co-operation with local authorities and civil society and on environmental issues. Fulfilling Albanian authorities' requests, abiding with the new Finnish Chairpersonship's guidance and benefiting from the support of 57 OSCE participating States, we will accompany Albania on its democratization path, giving our contribution to the consolidation of its security environment and democratic institutions and to its gender and youth policies.

We look forward pursuing this inspiring journey with all our Albanian and international partners!

Ambassador Michel Tarran

OSCE Presence concludes Master's in Criminology project

After over five years of intensive work, on 12 December, we wrapped up our project on the establishment of a Master's Programme in Criminology, the first in Albania included in the third cycle of studies. So far, 190 students have been enrolled in the Programme and 52 have graduated. Another major achievement is the establishment of a Research Centre in Criminology. In one of the final project's activities, a delegation from Tirana University conducted a research visit to the USA. The project was financed by the USA, UK and Italy.



Strengthening police dog units and canine training in Albania

Police dog units received specialized vehicles and equipment, as part of our project against small arms and light weapons. On 3 December, representatives from the OSCE Presence, Ministry of Interior, State Police and donors attended a ceremony marking the conclusion of the training sessions for the Canine Training Institute of the Albanian State Police. Plans to upgrade the Institute's premises were also discussed. The project is funded by the European Union, Germany and France.



Special meeting of International Election Working Group

On 18 December, Ambassador Tarran hosted a special meeting of the International Election Working Group with Heads of Missions of OSCE participating States and international organizations in Albania. Invited as special guests, State Election Commissioner and Director of Out-of-Country Voting briefed participants of the CEC preparations and answered questions. The Group is a forum initiated by the Presence that meets periodically on electoral issues.



Ambassador Tarran visits Gjirokastra



The Head of Presence, Ambassador Michel Tarran, visited Gjirokastra on 4 and 5 December to meet with local officials and attend two events – a roundtable on the establishment of the Local Safety Council and a training for prosecutors and judicial police officers on cybercrime and electronic evidence. Ambassador Tarran met with Gjirokastra Mayor and Prefect to discuss the establishment of the Local Safety Council, issues concerning the municipality and the region and opportunities for collaboration with the Presence.

Enhancing voting secrecy

On 11 December, together with the Central Election Commission, we organized a roundtable on ways to enhance voting secrecy and prevent voter intimidation. Participants included representatives from state institutions, political parties, law enforcement, civil society and international experts. This was the fourth and final roundtable organized by the Presence and the CEC in 2024 on strengthening electoral integrity and public trust ahead of 2025 elections. Previous events addressed voter education, vote-buying and the role of media in elections.



Depoliticization of electoral administration



Electoral administration depoliticization was at the centre of a conference that the Presence organized together with the Central Election Commission, the Venice Commission and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, on 10 December. Key stakeholders discussed challenges of electoral administration and emphasized the need for impartial and well-trained electoral workers. The conference highlighted the importance of professional electoral management bodies as a cornerstone of democratic elections.

Roundtable on improving election administration

From 12 to 14 December, we supported a roundtable of the Central Election Commission on ways to improve election administration. The event brought together representatives of CEC structures, political parties, media and civil society organizations. Key topics included: reporting by public institutions and handling complaints; challenges in election administration; enhancing voter education; implementation of electronic voting; media monitoring during election campaigns and strengthening media collaboration; and challenges in enabling voting from abroad.



Supporting voting from abroad



On 16 December, the Presence supported a roundtable of the Central Election Commission on the "Communication strategy for voting from abroad". The strategy aims to inform, educate and raise awareness among voters living outside Albania. Discussion focused on the methodology for informing voters about voting from abroad; challenges and solutions for effective communication; and successful international practices. The event concluded with recommendations for concrete steps that the CEC should take to implement the communication strategy.

Focus on gender



In December, we continued our numerous activities as part of the 16 Days against Gender-based Violence. They included: a meeting between Dragash (Kosovo) and Kukës Municipalities to foster exchange on domestic violence responses; training for women employees of Shkodra Municipality; gender training for youth; and launching of “OSCE proposed minimum standards for police and judicial training on violence against women and girls”. On 17 December, at the Assembly premises, the Presence co-organized a roundtable on empowering women in politics.

MPs visit North Macedonia parliament

Members of the parliamentary Committee for National Security from both ruling majority and opposition conducted a visit to North Macedonia parliament, with the support of the OSCE Presence. The exchange visit focused on issues of parliamentary oversight on security and intelligence services and also on oversight of implementation of measures for interception of communications. On their way back, on 11 December, the Committee conducted field monitoring meetings in Korça and Pogradec on policing and security, public order and border-crossing.



Visit to Scottish parliament



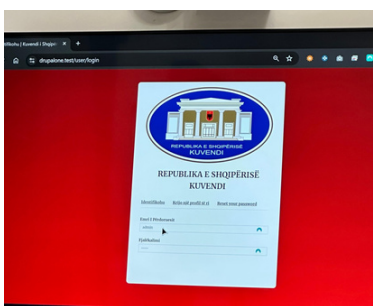
From 17 to 19 December, a delegation from the Albanian Assembly administration, chaired by the Secretary General, participated in a Presence-organized visit to Scottish parliament focused strategic management and international relations. Discussions with Scottish parliament senior officials included management, strategic and organizational issues; parliament financial and administrative autonomy; international relations; inclusive processes and outreach policies.

MPs on field monitoring in Gjirokastra

On 6 December, the Presence facilitated a field monitoring visit to Gjirokastra for the parliamentary Committee on Education and Media, focused on the two areas of responsibility of the Committee – education and culture. The MPs met with senior management, lecturers and students of Gjirokastra University and visited the town’s castle and museums. The visit was part of a series of meetings that the Committee held in several public universities across the country within the framework of the function of parliamentary control and oversight.



Training on e-Legislation portal



Two crucial training sessions on the e-Legislation portal took place at the Assembly’s premises on 3 and 4 December, organized by the Presence. The training covered the practical use of Lime Editor for law consolidation, along with the technical aspects of portal management and maintenance through Drupal. It also marked the start of the handover process, equipping participants with skills and knowledge to ensure a smooth transition. The events were part of our Swiss-funded project “Support for e-Legislation in Albania”.

Advancing legal drafting skills



High-quality legal drafting is a cornerstone of a strong and transparent legal framework. On 11 and 12 December, we organized a training on legislative drafting skills and corruption proofing for 45 legal advisors of the High Prosecutorial Council, High Judicial Council and parliament. The training combined theory with practical exercises, offering participants an excellent opportunity to deepen their knowledge and enhance their professional networks. By equipping legal professionals with advanced drafting skills, we support Albania's efforts to strengthen the rule of law.

Anti-corruption measures in public procurement

On 12 December, we supported a roundtable on "Anti-Corruption measures in the public procurement area", as part of the Integrity Week. Deputy Head of Presence Clarisse Pasztory highlighted the OSCE work in this area, including corruption proofing of legislation and risk mapping methodologies, development of public procurement curricula and establishment of a certified pool of experts. She also pointed out the work with civil society organizations and investigative journalists.



Training on public procurement, anti-corruption



On 13 December, the Presence held a training session on public procurement and anti-corruption measures with the Constitutional Court staff. The training explored key principles of public procurement and Albania's legal framework, and offered practical tools to identify conflicts of interest. This event was part of our project "Strengthening rule of law and promoting protection of human rights in Albania through support to the Constitutional Court", financed by the U.S., Italy and Greece.

Evaluation of Constitutional Court Strategic Plan

Strengthening transparency, efficiency and institutional capacity remains at the core of our support to the Constitutional Court. On 6 December, we brought together key offices of the Court to review the progress of the Court's Strategic Plan (2024-2026) and the implementation of the measures to achieve the objectives throughout the year. Participants analyzed measures implemented during 2024, with a focus on their effectiveness, and achieving strategic objectives for the remaining years.



Peer exchange on money laundering



On 16 December, we facilitated a peer exchange meeting at the Italian Embassy, focusing on financial investigations related to money laundering through cryptocurrencies. The event fostered the exchange of experiences and best practices between Italian and Albanian law enforcement agencies. The meeting convened prosecutors and investigators from SPAK along with officials from the Albanian State Police and the Albanian Financial Intelligence Agency, who discussed ways to enhance investigative strategies.

Cyber awareness training for law enforcement



In today's digital age, police officers are on the frontlines of protecting not only their communities but also their departments from cyber threats. To address the growing challenges posed by cyber threats, on 16 and 20 December, the OSCE Presence organized cyber awareness training sessions in Berat and Durrës Regional Police Directorates. Topics included identifying and preventing cyber threats; best practices for safe internet use; protecting sensitive data and systems; and responding to cybercrime incidents effectively.

Strengthening dialogue on human rights

Strengthening dialogue between national human rights institutions and local authorities and civil society organizations was the aim of a series of roundtables that we organized with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. The events – which took place in Peshkopi, Tropoja, Kuçova and Roskovec, from 13 November to 11 December – focused on promoting joint strategies against discrimination and on human rights protection. The Presence supports the Commissioner – a key national human rights institution – to promote their mission throughout the country.



Empowering elderly citizens



On 5 December, together with the Regional Office of the People's Advocate, we were at the Polyvalent Daily Center in Saranda, where 25 elderly participants shared challenges in using e-Albania, obtaining personal documents, accessing information and utilizing legal remedies. This initiative is part of the Presence's work in monitoring the human rights situation in Albania. In 2024, we visited 8 districts – the other 4 in 2025 – and held around 60 meetings with institutions and elderly people to better understand their needs and identify best ways to provide support.

Training future judges and prosecutors

On 4 and 5 December, we held a training for magistrate students, further strengthening the partnership with the School of Magistrates in their mission to prepare future judges and prosecutors. Using our newly published manual and an immersive mock trial methodology, we guided participants through the complexities of prosecuting and adjudicating child trafficking cases. The training was part of the Presence's project "Advancement of the anti-trafficking training capacities of the School of Magistrates and Security Academy", funded by the USA, Norway and Italy.



Together for environment



"Education and awareness for a sustainable future should begin at an early age, even in kindergartens," emphasized Deputy Head of Presence Clarisse Pasztory, at a civic hackathon, in Shkodra on 3 December. The event brought together local institutions, civil society, academia, youth and media to tackle four key challenges: waste management, water governance, forest governance and interinstitutional co-operation. It was organized as part of our project "Enhancing environmental governance and security in Albania", funded by Norway, Italy and France.

Mobile journalism training for future reporters



Mobile journalism is transforming the media landscape. In line with this trend, from 2 to 6 December, the Presence organized a Mobile Journalism Capacity Building Programme for 15 students from University of Tirana's Department of Journalism. The students learned how to shoot, edit and produce engaging video content using mobile apps. They also explored the ethical aspects of mobile journalism, focusing on accuracy and fairness in reporting. At the end of the training, the students showcased their newly-gained skills with news videos they created.

Modernizing public broadcaster

On 11 and 12 December, we organized an exchange visit to Pristina for a delegation from the Albanian Radio and Television. The goal? Fostering collaboration and innovation in public service media. The visitors engaged with colleagues from Kosovo's public and private broadcasters to explore strategies for enhancing online presence and advancing digital innovation. Discussions centred on improving social media engagement, optimizing digital platforms and integrating AI into media operations, with guidance from industry specialists.



Increasing school safety



With the aim to enhance school safety and security through preventive actions, the Presence organized a series of soft skills training events for school security officers in Korça, Tirana and Shkodra, from 7 to 9 December. The training equipped school security officers with skills like conflict de-escalation, effective communication and emotional resilience. The Presence's work to enhance community safety and security will continue in 2025 with initiatives that will be implemented in partnership with state authorities at local and central levels.

Annual meeting of regional border police heads

From 17 to 19 December, we gathered in Korça with the Border Police Directors of Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo, in the traditional Presence-facilitated annual cross-border meeting, to discuss general situation at the borders and exchange information. The meetings are part of the assistance given by the Presence in support of the Joint Cross-border Co-operation Mechanism, which brings into the table the regional border police directors of Albania and its neighbours. The overall aim is to strengthen regional co-operation for border security.



Tajik officials on study visit to Tirana



From 3 to 6 December, the Presence facilitated a study visit to Tirana for eight Tajik representatives from state institutions. The purpose of the visit was to learn about Albania's framework and practices for preventing and responding to domestic violence, and help Tajik authorities adapt their domestic violence framework. The delegation met with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Committee on Women and Family Affairs and non-governmental organizations to explore effective practices and preventive measures.