



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

**AMBASSADOR WOLLFARTH'S TALKING POINTS AT CONFERENCE ON  
ENHANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE**

*Sheraton Hotel, 9 November 2010*

Madame Speaker Topalli, Deputy Minister Kodra, Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

On this the 10th anniversary of the UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, it gives me great pleasure in welcoming you to this conference on addressing women's participation in public and political life that has been co-organised by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the OSCE Presence in Albania.

Can I also welcome all the many women leaders from around the region who have taken the time to be with us today.

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Madam Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, this Conference being held over the next two days brings together women from the South East European region to discuss within a national and regional context, issues of gender equality in public and political life and security.

This conference will focus on the achievements in promoting gender equality, the implementation of national gender equality strategies, the UNSCR 1325 and lessons learnt.

The national conference held on challenging gender stereotypes last June in Tirana saw the clear and undoubted commitment of Prime Minister Berisha and Madam Speaker in supporting the full and active participation of women in public and political life.

Let us be clear – greater equality between women and men is vital to achieving security, prosperity, and full democratic standards and hence to security and stability in the OSCE area.

The OSCE has always seen the promotion of gender equality a top priority; starting with the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act when participating States committed themselves to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without any distinction based on gender.

In 2005, the OSCE formally endorsed the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality that promotes the rights, interests and concerns of women in areas where inequality and discrimination are most prevalent.

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Madame Speaker, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen

The role of the Executive, Legislative and civil society in mainstreaming gender into policies and the implementation of gender legislation is evidently critical.

Political parties also have a key role to play in establishing and maintaining a conducive environment in which a fairer political representation of women in representational institutions can be assured.

The equal representation of women and men in politics is a key parameter of any modern democracy.

With May 2011 local government elections soon to be upon us, only some 26 weeks away I might add, this will be an excellent chance to see whether the Albanian political class is really serious about dealing with the issue of gender inequality.

Let us again be clear - the percentage of elected women local councillors needs to rise from the current lowly base of 10%.

We should be helped by the fact that we now have an Electoral Code that envisages one out of three candidates on all election lists, provided by the political parties, must be a woman.

However, all political parties now need to adhere to this legal stipulation.

Certainly, the strong and resolute public commitments so far from all political sides on this point are an encouraging sign.

Yet, we now need to see that the majesty of their resolve be equally translated into the magnificence of concrete and irrevocable actions taken.

In particular, a full and determined effort must be made to ensure that tougher sanctions are issued for all violations of the gender quota.

The fact that the current Code allows for a political party to be fined a paltry 300 US dollars for a violation is frankly unacceptable, outdated and irrelevant for a country that claims to be serious about gender equality in the year of 2010.

The fact also that there will be no decertification of all election lists in case of a violation, as was the case in 2009, shows that unless some changes are now made, a reduction in the 'gender deficit' will simply not happen.

These local government elections will also allow the Albanian public to see how large the turnout of women voters will be and to what extent will women be able to vote individually and secretly, thus eliminating the objectionable practice of family voting.

If we are all serious about our integration aspirations for this country, simply excusing such behaviour as being part of the 'Albanian culture' will no longer be good enough.

Supported by the Central Elections Commission, the Albanian political class, as a whole, should be standing firm and resolute in condemning all such practices.

The time is now to grab the moment, to make the change - not simply to further all integration ambitions, rightful though that is, but because to make the change is simply the right thing to do.

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Madame Speaker, Deputy Minister Kodra, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Today's conference is part of a project funded by the Embassy of the Netherlands and the Swedish International Development Agency and implemented by the OSCE-Presence entitled 'Enhancing Women's Role in Governance'.

I would like to publicly thank both missions not only for their financial support but also for their thematic encouragement to this project.

Project activities included regional forums which resulted in the establishment of the National Platform for Women that will present its action plan at this conference, TV shows produced and aired in all regional television stations, seminars and events such as this Conference encouraging women to take greater political responsibility.

Finally, and with your indulgence, I would like to finish with some words from one former great statesman, as I believe they accurately define our core aims in terms of wanting to see greater gender equality in Albania. He said:

"Your imagination and your initiative and your indignation will determine whether we build a society where progress is the servant of our needs, or a society where old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth".

Thank you very much and can I again wish you a very successful, lively and productive conference.

**ENDS**

*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*