



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a. i. Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 14, 2011

The United States welcomes the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, Mr. Edmond Haxhinasto, to this special meeting of the Permanent Council. Mr. Minister, it is a pleasure to have you here today. We thank you for your comprehensive and forward-looking statement.

The United States enjoys an excellent relationship with Albania—in Tirana, in Washington, in Vienna and beyond. We appreciate our close cooperation, and we look forward to it continuing in the future. Albania has taken significant steps in the past two decades to strengthen its democracy. Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, you can count on our support towards the fulfillment of your state's aspirations to EU accession.

We value your thoughtful comments on the future of the OSCE. We have learned many lessons from the transitions to democracy that have taken place across the OSCE space in the last 20 years, and we have an obligation to share them with the OSCE's Partner states. The OSCE can serve as a platform to facilitate a dialogue on best practices with our Mediterranean Partners, and this dialogue will allow us as an organization to strengthen our shared commitments across all three OSCE dimensions.

ODIHR's generally positive report in the wake of the local elections in May testifies to Albania's progress, but the report did note some shortfalls in this process. We encourage the full implementation of the ODIHR report recommendations, especially of amendments to the Electoral Code in order to address the validity of ballots cast in the wrong ballot box, the adoption of procedures for including such ballots in the table of results, and the development of procedures to follow in case of discrepancies when the number of ballots cast exceeds the number of signatures in the voter list. The Electoral Code would also benefit from a review of the definition of contested ballots and of the procedures for contesting ballots.

We also encourage all political parties to refrain from divisive political rhetoric in favor of practical, political dialogue to increase the faith of the Albanian people in their democratic system.

We commend you and the Government of Albania for your cooperation with OSCE's Presence in Albania. We turned to the OSCE Presence in Albania for information during the tense time early in January of this year, and the cooperation of Albanian authorities with Ambassador Wollfarth and his team ensured the Permanent Council understood developments and that the OSCE was able to contribute to the alleviation of tensions. We urge the Government of Albania to use its relationship with the OSCE Presence to pursue continued reforms.

Lastly, we welcome your remarks on the need for stability in the region, and we trust that Albania will continue to play a constructive role as an advocate for peace and cooperation. The success of the region depends on close regional cooperation—a fact highlighted by the tense relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The United States reiterates its commitment to an independent, multiethnic, democratic Kosovo. Like you, we underscore the importance of a continuation of the EU facilitated dialogue to focus on cooperative solutions that that will improve the everyday life of citizens. We also must reiterate our full support for the work of EULEX and KFOR in Kosovo, which they are executing professionally and fully in accordance with their mandates. The recent violence we saw directed against the international community presence in northern Kosovo is not acceptable. We call on all parties to avoid inflammatory rhetoric or actions, which only serve to exacerbate tensions and stall progress toward our shared objective of integrating all of the Balkan states into the Euro-Atlantic family of democracies.

Mr. Minister, we thank you again for your visit and for your presentation to the OSCE Permanent Council. We congratulate you and Albania on twenty years of progress, and we look forward to continued fruitful cooperation in the coming years.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.