



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Address
by H.E. Mr. Ditmir Bushati,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania,
as delivered at the 1117th meeting
of the Permanent Council of the OSCE
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Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to speak to you today in the Permanent Council. Let me first thank you, Ambassador Pohl, for the warm welcome and assure the German Chairmanship of Albania's strong support in the run-up to the Hamburg Ministerial. We will meet in almost a month to discuss and decide, based on the work you do here in Vienna. I believe that Minister Steinmeier is right that, in the current security situation in the OSCE area, it may not be enough for Ministers to meet only once a year. The informal Ministerial in Potsdam was indeed a good idea, not only to exchange views, but also to reflect on our expectations for Hamburg.

My country joined this Organization 25 years ago, which presented a good occasion for me to reflect on Albania's partnership with OSCE, and share some of those thoughts with you today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Back in 1991, when "the era of confrontation and division of Europe had ended", Albania was emerging from decades of isolation with a thirst for belonging and in search of freedom. It found both in this organization, with its promise of a whole and free Europe. Much has changed in 25 years, for the better. But there is no denying that today, the OSCE vision shaped by all of us for a whole and secure Europe is looking farther away.

It does not have to be so. And this is the first point I wish to convey today. I believe that the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe

are as valid today as they were back then. Let us not forget that then-CSCE used to be a unique forum for a constructive dialogue between the sides separated by the Iron Curtain. Democracy based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, prosperity through economic freedom and social justice, equal security for all the participating States – this is what our people hoped and expected a quarter of a century ago, and this is what they still hope and expect today. It is the task of policy-makers, like myself, to deliver to the people that trust us to govern.

It is not easy, but important things rarely are. My country has made a bid to join the European Union as a natural consequence of our development. We are in the process of undertaking crucial reforms, among which a reform that envisages a radical overhaul of the justice system. The aim is to ensure its independence, accountability, professionalism and effectiveness, and to uproot corruption. It is a challenging process, fraught with difficulties. But, we have the political will to carry out the reform, and we have been able to rely on the outstanding support of partners, the European Union and the United States. The commitment we have made with regard to human rights, democracy, rule of law, protection of minorities and tolerance are at the very core of this Organization. We have to be determined in complying with these commitments.

The second point I wish to make is that we should be duly appreciative of the assistance and support that the OSCE offers to participating States in implementing our commitments. The OSCE is a unique arrangement, with a comprehensive concept of security, crisis management tools and confidence-building measures, executive structures, autonomous institutions and field operations. It is sometimes said that there are two OSCEs: one east and another west of Vienna, or one with field operations and one without. But there is just the one, which the participating States set up long ago and run to this day by consensus. So, if the OSCE is falling short of fulfilling its promise, if we think that its potential is underutilized, we should also turn to ourselves for the answers. Let me just say that we very much support the work done by the German Chairmanship to explore ways of strengthening the capabilities of the OSCE, particularly in addressing the conflict cycle.

My third point today is about dialogue. Insufficient implementation of OSCE norms, principles and commitments is not new, and I regret that my own country makes no exception. The OSCE, however, provides a platform for participating States to hold each other to account regarding implementation. Yet, for it to truly work, we must really talk with each other, and not just about each other. Rhetoric is no substitute for dialogue, and parallel monologues are no dialogue either.

Each of the participating States has something unique to contribute in the OSCE. For my country, I believe it is tolerance. It is not something learned. Religious harmony, multicultural understanding, tolerance and acceptance are part of our heritage, of our social fabric. In an environment of hatred, xenophobia, toxic rhetoric and radicalization, I believe we may offer a different model for building bridges, promoting trust, and fostering understanding between peoples in the OSCE area.

I do subscribe to the view of the Chairman-in-Office that when differences are too big to overcome, it may be wise to look for practical areas of cooperation. In the Western Balkans, we call it connectivity. The Berlin Process and its connectivity agenda – building and improving connectivity within Western Balkans and between Western Balkans and EU through projects of regional importance in the field of transport, energy and trade – has proven to be a key factor in overcoming barriers and strengthening political confidence-building and security in the region.

The newest initiative, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, aims to build new bridges and enhance cooperation trends, boost dialogue, promote understanding, truth and reconciliation among young people. It will engage youth in regional projects, so that they can contribute to the promotion of democratic values, tolerance, human rights, and fight against racism, xenophobia, hate speech and discrimination.

Yet another important regional initiative will also have its seat in Tirana, the Western Balkans Fund. Modeled after and supported by the International Visegrad Fund, it will focus on the promotion of common values between citizens, civil society and institutions in the region, strengthening cooperation and people-to-people contacts.

Deeper economic integration, increased political association and improved people-to-people contacts have contributed significantly to strengthening regional security. I believe that these elements are a driving force for the implementation of our reform agendas. On the other hand, they have made us look closer at what we, within our societies, are doing about good governance and rule of law – including economic rule of law; media freedom; civil society; women, youth and minorities. Protecting their rights and empowering them to enjoy those rights is a first step to ensure a more stable and secure region.

We have managed to make good progress in regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. There are six countries in the format, and we look forward to the day when Kosovo will be seating around this table as a participating State. But till that day comes, we strongly encourage the incoming Austrian Chairmanship to explore ways of ensuring that this organization does not discuss about Kosovo, without Kosovo.

Addressing the issues posed by large movements of migrants and refugees requires solidarity and partnership. The challenges of violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism know no boundaries. That is why it is necessary to have a genuine partnership with our Mediterranean Partners. I would like to congratulate Austria for the excellent organization of the 2016 Mediterranean Conference, and for looking at the common challenges we face north and south of the Mediterranean as opportunities for stronger cooperation and enhanced security.

Distinguished Ambassadors,

In the run up of Hamburg Ministerial, allow me to make a couple of remarks on the issues, which I consider of a paramount importance.

First, arms control, including disarmament and confidence- and security-building, which is integral to the OSCE's comprehensive and cooperative concept of security. While Europe's security order has severely been challenged since the annexation of Crimea, the OSCE framework for Conventional Arms Control is still in place. Commitments do not go away, just because one decides to violate them. If anything, increased transparency, cooperation and confidence become even more important as means to increase stability and security. It is deeply regretful that efforts to modernize the Vienna Document have stalled. But it is encouraging that there is broad support from participating States, including my own, to continue discussions on Conventional Arms Control and CSBMs.

Second, the crisis in and around Ukraine, which remains a major threat to European security. Respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine is nothing more than what we owe under international law and the commitments undertaken in this Organization. We will continue to reiterate this, just as we will repeat that the solution can only be political. There is no alternative to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. But for the progress that has been made, it is important to stop and recognize the significant role of the OSCE and of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

Third, conflicts, active or protracted, which take a heavy toll on the people who are caught in them. Too many participating States have first-hand experience with conflict; some have lived with daily limitations and continuous uncertainty for decades. I cannot offer any solutions or words of wisdom. But I believe it's important to keep in mind that these are not just terrible situations; these are people, refugees, victims of war, IDPs. Just last week, the President of the ICRC stated in this room that humanitarian action cannot

substitute political action. Therefore, I would encourage you to truly engage with the proposals you are discussing for Hamburg.

Mr. Chairperson,

Let me conclude by congratulating Germany for its tremendous work at the helm of the OSCE, though the job is not over yet. I also wish to congratulate Austria and Italy, for taking over the steering of this Organization in the next two years. You may count on my country's support and close cooperation.

I thank you for your attention!