

**ADDRESS OF THE HEAD OF OSCE PRESENCE IN ALBANIA,
AMBASSADOR EUGEN WOLLFARTH**
Court leadership conference
Tirana, 20 April 2012

Minister Halimi,
Ambassadors,
Ms. Vata,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's conference is important, is relevant, and is needed.

On behalf of OSCE Presence I can wholeheartedly say that we are very pleased to join the efforts made today.

I would like to congratulate the USAID JUST Project and the High Council of Justice for organizing this event. My thanks equally go to all the participants for their presence, and for their contribution to the further development of court leadership in Albania.

National courts have to be a pillar of democracy in every country.

National courts have to be a pillar of democracy in Albania.

When functioning properly, the courts bring the legal rights of citizens to life by providing fair and impartial justice.

That is why it is vital that the courts serve the public in a competent, transparent and accountable manner.

And in Albania - the administration of justice deserves and needs to be a whole lot better.

This is a view widely shared inside and outside the country.

The need to intervene in this area has also been identified as a key factor for Albania's aspirations and prospects for European integration, and towards living up to OSCE commitments.

In this regard, the Government's approval of the 2011-2013 Justice Crosscutting Strategy and its Action Plan certainly marks an important step in the right direction.

The JUST Project's efforts to increase the court room usage and to introduce audio recording are also important and commendable.

However, greater efforts by all actors are needed to improve the quality of the functioning of the courts and thus build and strengthen public trust.

Providing assistance to the judicial reform process has been one of the traditional core tasks of the OSCE Presence in Albania.

It is professionally satisfying to note that the Presence's recommendations, contained in two earlier trial observation reports, form the basis for the current discussions of the Criminal Procedure Reform Working Group working under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice.

We understand also that recommendations for improving civil proceedings are expected to be shared with the interested stakeholders later in the year.

Today's event will focus on key technical and practical issues that will contribute to enhancing the role of the judiciary.

The topics to be discussed today - increasing the usage of court rooms, audio recording and active case management - will definitely help judges improve the quality of their trials.

Increased court room usage and audio recording technology increases transparency of proceedings, while active case management techniques contribute to more efficient trials.

This, in turn, will help to reduce the workload of judges and help increase the public trust.

Such concrete steps will help to improve the services rendered to the public by the courts.

Yet, judicial reform cannot be achieved without a real and effective partnership between the courts, the High Council of Justice, Government, and Parliament and Albania's international partners, including the JUST Project and the OSCE Presence.

The ability to make real and long lasting improvements will only derive from co-ordinated efforts, and from the professional will to move forward.

International experience elsewhere would suggest that the strength of international partners lies in being able to offer relevant international examples and experiences.

In most cases, there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel'.

It is more about choosing which internationally tested 'wheel' is the best fit for Albania.

You are experts on Albanian legal procedures and on the details needed for a functioning judiciary.

You are the ones best placed to assess to what extent international experiences are relevant for Albania – to choose a quality wheel for your needs.

We understand, however, that being part of the Albanian courts of justice is not easy work.

It is a professional *day by day* challenge to serve as a judge or as a court manager.

Undue pressure, coupled with sometimes a lack of proper logistical infrastructure will not create the right conditions for efficient and effective results.

This should, nevertheless, not discourage you from continued efforts in delivering justice in due time to the public.

Minister Halimi,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to wish everyone a successful conference and to reassure you that the OSCE Presence in Albania stands ready to provide further assistance, jointly with our international and national partners.

Thank you very much

Ends