



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

Press Conference

**Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of Presence
24 February 2004**

I will be travelling to Vienna today to report to the Permanent Council of the OSCE on the latest developments in the country and the plans for the Presence in 2004. I will be accompanied on my trip by Ambassador Salzmann from the European Commission Delegation. Foreign Minister Kastriot Islami will also be present in Vienna to address the Permanent Council on the same day.

Negotiations to update the Presence's mandate concluded successfully at the end of last year due to the close dialogue held between the Presence and the government. The new mandate gives the Presence a firm basis for its continued role in the country.

Since our last report delivered in November, the Presence has continued to devote significant resources to covering the re-run elections and following the progress of the property draft law in the Assembly. During this period, the Presence also completed its lengthy analysis of Albania's legal and judicial sector, which was launched last week, and has initiated support to the Assembly for revising its Rules of Procedure.

In the current political situation, which has seen an unfortunate breakdown in political will, we cannot lose sight of the important reform processes underway. Important issues such as electoral reform, property restitution, and territorial reform, among others, require broad political agreement. Decision-making must be kept transparent and inclusive. Here is where the continued role of the Presence as a facilitator to support the political process remains critical.

With the ODIHR *Final Report* on the local elections due to be released in the next few days, the Presence will begin political consultations to re-start the anticipated continuation of electoral reform.

The Presence was encouraged that both the opposition and the government approached Saturday's demonstrations with maturity and responsibility. I believe this is an indicator that all sides are willing to address Albania's challenges within the bounds of the democratic process. We expect that similar attitudes will also be displayed in the future.

The recent successes of outspoken civil society groups such as Mjaft! and the Citizen's Advocacy Office, as well as trade unions, business associations and others is a positive sign that democracy is evolving in Albania. It is a welcome development that public expression is no longer the closely held preserve of political parties. The recent letter drafted by a group of NGOs calling on politicians to show greater responsibility and respect in the Assembly is another example of this.

With this in mind, the Presence will be incorporating a number of themes into its work throughout the year, namely, *transparency* and *public participation* in governance. In addition, the Presence will also be greatly emphasising *gender equality*, particularly given the disappointing and continued decline of women in politics.

The overall goal of the Presence in Albania continues to be supporting democratisation, rule of law and human rights. To fulfil this goal, the Presence is working in the areas of legislative and judicial reform, including property restitution and compensation, regional administrative reform, electoral reform, parliamentary capacity-building, anti-trafficking and anti-corruption activities, media development, civil society development and police assistance.

Questions & Answers

Q: Mr Ambassador, could you please tell us something more about the political situation in Albania, the reforms you have been monitoring, something about what you are going to present to the Permanent Council? Are you going to present your evaluation about the report and the political situation in Albania to the Permanent Council?

A: There will of course be an evaluation of the situation, but according to the OSCE rules, I cannot go into more detailed comments before the report has been presented before the Permanent Council, because the Council is authorising the report.

Q: Mr Ambassador, what changes have you seen in Albania since your last report in June when you stated you expected some social unrest because of an economic degradation?

A: I have to remind that I have delivered one report already after the June report. In the last report I expressed worries about the declining consensual climate. Regarding the economic and the social situation, there have been no fast changes to it. There has been a continued growth, but as it happens quite often, the most disadvantaged parts of the society have benefited very little from this growth. Also, the growth has concentrated very much to the capital city area. So, while there is a certain progress, the number of those living in really difficult social and economic circumstances is extremely high.

Q: When you say that a broad political agreement needs to be reached in order to implement several reforms, such as electoral reform, regional administrative reform, etc., do you mean that Mr Berisha and Mr Nano have to sit together to reach this agreement or there are other factors that would influence this as well?

A: Of course, if you try to reach as wide a consensus as possible on these kind of key issues, it means that the major parties have to reach an agreement somehow. It would be the best that the leaders sit down, as I believe they probably might. Or at least there will be an indirect discussion between them, because there has to be an agreement on how to continue the process. Certain discussions have already taken place, in which

we have been touching basis, and I believe there will be readiness on both sides. The opposition has already expressed their readiness and as I understand the Government has been ready all the time, at least when it comes to the electoral reform.

Q: You had a meeting recently with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Kosovo, Mr Harri Holkeri. Could you tell us a little bit more about the topics of your discussion?

A: When two countrymen meet, you discuss first things first. Mr Holkeri's No. 1 aide is my former No. 1 aide. Of course, we were commenting how he has been doing. We were of course also preparing for upcoming meetings and briefing each other on how we see the situation in the region. We also have a couple of ideas on how to enhance the co-operation in the future. I will visit Kosovo and Mr Holkeri's team sometime in the near future.

Q: Mr Ambassador, what do you mean when you say that there has been a breakdown of the political will? What would you suggest to political parties, as it seems so far that the only agreement for the opposition is the achievement of the technical government?

A: I believe you are trying to mix a couple of things that do not belong together. It is clear that the extremely constructive consensual spirit we had last winter and spring, which resulted in the new Electoral Code, an effort to solve the property restitution issue and the OSCE-led Technical Expert Group, this in fact normal part of parliamentarism became more difficult as the local elections were approaching, because certain agreements on implementation of the bipartisan committee's work were not implemented. It affected additionally the political climate, and practically lead close to a political breakdown. There were also other indicators affecting the situation. The end of the year was very difficult in the politics, but somehow it seems we are now getting on the right track. This will of course be tested in the next couple of weeks.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, before you leave for Vienna, could you give an individual, personal evaluation of the political situation in Albania?

A: I have been giving my evaluation. In this kind of role you do not have personal and official opinions. You have only one opinion. It is based on the principles of the OSCE and our mandate. I can say however that the task is difficult, but there is hope.