



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

**REMARKS BY THE ACTING HEAD OF PRESENCE, ROBERT WILTON,
AT AN EVENT ABOUT MISSING PERSONS**

1 September 2015

Camps like the one in Tepelena bear witness to painful truths from Albania's Communist past: the relocation, interment, forced labour, torture and murder of countless people. Today, we are here to remember, to bear witness to the suffering that we know the people forced to come here experienced.

We should also remember the approximately 6,000 people buried in unmarked graves throughout Albania during the Communist period. It is important to find these disappeared persons and to strive to uncover the whole truth, both for the families of the disappeared and for society at large.

Albanians, and particularly the families of those who were killed or who disappeared, have a right to know what happened. Society needs to hear the stories of survivors and to be able to grasp the extent of violations under the former regime. Families must know the whole truth, whenever possible, so that they can mourn, honour and remember their loved ones in peace. Also, citizens need to see that the authorities are actively working to bring these violations to light and to ensure that they never happen again.

The International Commission on Missing Persons, which has made great strides in locating and identifying the missing in Bosnia and elsewhere, was first in contact with the Albanian authorities in 2010. They held a follow-up visit this year. We strongly encourage the Albanian authorities to work with this organization regarding disappearances. It is also crucial to listen to and collaborate with the families, and to make sure the public is aware of the process.

Addressing the issue of disappeared persons in a sensitive and committed manner is part of a broader process to deal with the legacy of the Communist regime in Albania. We also commend initiatives to transform some sites associated with the Communist era into sites of remembrance, such as the House of Leaves in Tirana as well as Spaç prison. The OSCE Presence is providing advice and expertise on initiatives to encourage fair and transparent access to the files of the former *Sigurimi*, in addition to supporting the fair compensation of people persecuted by the former regime.

Being here in Tepelena on this day reminds us that we need to do more to face the Communist past, which is why the Presence has launched an initiative, with support from the German government, to promote an inclusive national dialogue about how to deal with Albania's past. Next week, we will be co-hosting a public event in Tirana on this very topic with the People's Advocate. We encourage both state institutions and citizens to take an active role in dealing with the past.

Dealing with the Communist past is a way of ensuring Albania's democratic future. It is both a societal issue, and a deeply personal one, not only for survivors of camps like Tepelena and

for the families of the disappeared, but for all Albanians. I look forward to our discussions today on how best to advance this critical process.