



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

**Address by
Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of Presence
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I will be travelling to Vienna today to give the next six-monthly report to the Permanent Council of the OSCE on the latest developments within the country and the Presence's related activities, looking ahead to next year. Despite the intense debate provoked by our report in June, there has been strong continued support for the Presence's role. It has acted as an important moderator on two main issues carrying particular political importance, namely electoral reform and property restitution and compensation. At the same time, the Presence maintained its ongoing work in support of the rule of law and democratisation.

Although political tensions have emerged during this period around the elections, the welcome reception of the draft law on property shows that there are still possibilities to reach agreements on vital issues. Nonetheless, the Presence is concerned that the current pre-occupations are putting at risk, among other matters, the Stabilisation and Association Process, as also recently noted by the European Union.

The achievements made in the electoral reform process and the improved underlying political will to conduct free, fair and democratic elections significantly contributed to a very different kind of electoral campaign, one in which candidates throughout the country addressed issues affecting people's daily lives. The new Electoral Code addressed most of the ODIHR recommendations and has contributed to more positive roles for the police and media. The post-election period, however, has shown again the protracted and litigious nature of Albanian elections, in particular delay encountered in declaring results for Tirana. The Presence has been actively studying the problem of the voter lists and, together with ODIHR, is analysing the means of addressing the shortcomings.

Following on from the success of the electoral reform in 2003, further elements of reform, in particular the possibility of changing the electoral system, campaign financing and redrawing of electoral zone boundaries, will be debated. The issue of territorial administrative reform will also proceed next year. Given the clear political implications for such a challenging process, requiring transparency and fairness, the Presence has been invited to play a key role in this multi-year process by both the Ministry of Local Government and the leader of the opposition.

The issue of property restitution and compensation, if resolved by the end of 2003 through the adoption of a new law, will require the Presence's engagement to help ensure proper implementation at least in its early stages. However, further legal sector reform is vital to underpin most of the other ongoing reform processes. An area of main concern to the Presence is an across-the-board need for greater transparency to

reduce the inequities and arbitrariness of the judicial system resulting from the corruptive effects of influence peddling and conflicts of interest.

Despite the relatively positive signs of development in the overall institutional structure of the country and strengthening of the fundamental building blocks of the state, the country suffers from continued weaknesses in the field of justice and home affairs, in particular as regards the means to combat corruption and organised crime. Whilst the government has launched active measures and comprehensive strategies in this regard, implementation, as repeatedly noted, is slow and suffers from a lack of prioritisation.

The Presence is pursuing a number of programmes to assist in these areas. Its proposed budget for 2004 outlines its priorities for the next year, concentrating on furthering the reform process and strengthening democratic institutions.