



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania Ambassador Eugen Wollfarth

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 8, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States joins in welcoming Ambassador Wollfarth to the Permanent Council, and we thank you for your comprehensive report.

We congratulate the people of Albania for their recent achievements, most notably the opening of the Schengen area to Albanian citizens in December 2010. The United States and Albania enjoy excellent relations, and we are committed to the further strengthening of ties between our governments and peoples.

We commend the work of the Presence in Albania in partnership with the Government of Albania, Albanian institutions and NGOs, the U.S. Embassy in Tirana, and the EU. The Presence played a key stabilizing role in the aftermath of both the violent events in January and the contested municipal elections in May. It is clear that the efforts of the Presence have helped promote greater trust and respect between the Albanian people and their political structures.

The U.S. Government remains concerned about the effects of the political stalemate which continued in the wake of May's municipal elections, further delaying work needed to advance Albania's EU candidacy aspirations. We therefore commend the step taken by the Socialist Party (SP) on September 5 to rejoin the Assembly and its stated commitment to move the political process forward. We urge the SP to fulfill this commitment through full and active participation in Parliament and similarly call on the ruling coalition to create a more inclusive political climate. It is imperative that all sides of the political debate remember that their first responsibility is to the citizens of Albania. We urge them to move past historical divisions in order to ensure a responsible government.

Additionally, we are concerned that corruption remains problematic. We are heartened by the alignment of national legislation with international anti-corruption obligations as well as the introduction of electronic procurement systems. These are tangible steps in the right direction, and we encourage the Presence to continue to aid institutions in implementing this progressive legislation. We agree with you, Mr. Ambassador, that the fight against corruption can only succeed when no side uses the issue for partisan gain.

We also note the progress Albania is making in fighting organized crime, combating trafficking in human beings, and establishing gender equality. We are particularly pleased that the national strategy on gender equality and eradication of domestic violence was adopted and that the National Council on Gender Equality was established. We

encourage further inclusion of civil society into the arena of policy formation in order to instill a sense of faith in the political system among the Albanian people.

The Presence in Albania plays a significant role in the promotion of democratization and the Rule of Law and clearly serves as a platform for dialogue among diverse parties. With the election of a President set for 2012 and parliamentary elections for 2013, it is crucial that the Presence continue its excellent work in capacity building for democratic institutions, in promoting the inclusion of civil society and in providing support for electoral reform. We urge the Government of Albania to maintain its close cooperation with the OSCE Presence. The United States is fully committed to assisting Albania to sustain a fully-functional democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.