



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSCE PRESENCE IN ALBANIA

BACKGROUND AND MANDATE

In response to the breakdown of law and order throughout Albania at the beginning of 1997, the then Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, Niels Helveg Petersen of Denmark, despatched a Personal Representative, Dr. Franz Vranitzky, to the country to assess the situation. On the basis of his emergency reports to the Permanent Council it was decided on 27 March 1997 to establish an OSCE "Presence" in Albania (by PC Decision No. 160).

The Presence started work in April that year with a mandate to give advice and assistance to the Albanian authorities on democratization issues, the development of free media, the promotion of respect for human rights and the preparation and monitoring of elections. In December 1997, the OSCE PC broadened the Presence's mandate to include, *inter alia*, providing a flexible co-ordinating framework for other concerned international organizations to play their part in support of a coherent stabilization strategy for Albania.

After the situation in the country stabilized, parliamentary elections were held in June and July 1997. During this period, the OSCE concentrated its efforts on the political and social reconstruction of the country. Among its main tasks were the monitoring of parliamentary procedures, assisting Albanian lawmakers in the drafting of a new constitution, and co-ordinating humanitarian and economic assis-

tance. Since September 1998, the OSCE, together with the European Union (EU), has acted as co-chairman of the "Friends of Albania" Group, an informal forum for countries and international organizations active in providing Albania with financial support, technical assistance and other forms of aid.

Faced with the deteriorating crisis in neighbouring Kosovo in early 1998, the Presence was further tasked with a border monitoring role. Between March and September 1999, the OSCE played a key role in co-ordinating international and Albanian responses to the refugee crisis in the country (PC Decision No. 218, in March 1998).

Since the end of that conflict and the repatriation of half a million Kosovo refugees, the Presence shifted its focus back onto the internal issues of Albania, while maintaining some monitoring role in the areas bordering the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro.

Over the course of the year 2000, Albania experienced a change from a crisis to a developmental situation, a transition, which continues. In the year 2001, the OSCE Presence in Albania is concentrating particularly on the parliamentary elections due in June and continues to work intensively on efforts to enhance democratization in all fields of civil society.

STRUCTURE

The OSCE Presence is active throughout the entire territory of Albania, operating through a Head Office in Tirana and 11 field stations. The Head Office is led by the Head of Presence, who has the overall responsibility for policy matters, planning and operations. The Tirana Office is sub-divided into the following structures: political affairs, local government, parliamentary observation, rule of law, human rights, economics and environment,

Friends of Albania group/donor co-ordination, human dimension/non-governmental organization (NGO) support, and press and public information. Additionally, the Presence maintains a field station co-ordination centre, a logistics and transport office and an administration and finance office, collectively responsible for the administration and the management of the Head Office and its field stations.

ACTIVITIES

POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Under the general direction of the Head of Presence, the Political Officer is responsible for monitoring and advising on political developments in Albania, preparing and editing ad hoc and regular reports on political and related issues, including the activities of the Presence as a whole, for the OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CiO) and the Secretariat, and advising generally on the political dimension of all aspects of the Presence's work. In addition, the Political Officer serves as the co-ordinating point within the Presence, responsible for liaison with the CiO, OSCE Secretariat and neighbouring OSCE Missions on matters connected with the OSCE Regional Strategy, and co-operation with the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

PARLIAMENTARY OBSERVATION

Following the declaration from a first visit by the Tri-Parliamentary Mission (composed of representatives from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (CoE), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament), the Presence initiated and organized the systematic observation effort of parliamentary practice. The results of this are presented to the Albanian Parliament in a regular report on democratic standards of parliamentary practice. The observation has itself been conducive to the improvement of parliamentary practice and OSCE participating States have provided technical and material support in furtherance of the recommendations.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Presence supports the Albanian Government and local government organs through

its liaison officer. It facilitates dialogue and offers co-ordination of international donor and expert activities. In particular, the Presence is supporting the current decentralization process and the Government's decentralization task force through several joint projects and is assisting in local government cross-border co-operation. The Presence also provides support in the preparations of elections (e.g. the parliamentary elections in June 2001).

RULE OF LAW

The Legal Counsellors Office (LCO) encourages the development of the rule of law in Albania through a broad range of activities. Some of these activities are carried out in co-operation with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and with the CoE. It is the largest such office in Albania, and currently comprises nine lawyers. Its functions include:

Legislative reform

The LCO continues to provide advice on, and to monitor changes to, bills as they work their way through the legislative process. Where appropriate, the office assesses legislation in force and determines what requirements there may be for new or modified laws. The focus in recent times has been on implementation rather than on the drafting of laws. For example, work is in progress on the implementation of the Civil Service Law.

Legal education reform

At the Universities of Tirana and Shkodra and the Magistrates School, the LCO focuses on

developing institution-building capacity and providing technical legal assistance. Several LCO lawyers teach at the University of Tirana and the Magistrates School, exposing the students to analytical legal teaching methods.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The OSCE Presence Human Rights Office (HRO) is a part of the Legal Counsellors Office. The HRO monitors the human rights situation in Albania in close co-operation with the 11 field stations. In a few individual cases and on certain issues interventions are made with government officials. The HRO also advises the Legal Counsellor and other elements within the Presence on human rights questions, and suggests appropriate action. Particular emphasis is placed on monitoring Albania's obligations in fields such as trafficking in human beings and alleged police violence. Recently, work has been in progress on providing advice and assistance to the newly constituted Peoples Advocate's Office (or Ombudsman).

ECONOMICS AND ENVIRONMENT

Economy

The Economics and Environmental Office (EEO) works closely with the Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Trade, and monitors the progress of integration into the south-eastern European region and the European Union. As a member of the growth and poverty reduction strategy working group, the EEO assists the Government in tackling a comprehensive social and development programme. The EEO maintains contacts with chambers of commerce to help them find partners for capacity-building. It monitors the progress in the transition of the country's macroeconomic performance.

Environment

The EEO co-ordinates the Environmental Advocacy Platform. It compiles information about environmental issues such as chemical contamination, hazardous waste, illegal logging and the effects on people's health. It assists the Government in setting up a Ministry of Environment. The EEO initiates and supervises joint projects with Albanian environmental NGOs in order to raise public awareness.

FRIENDS OF ALBANIA GROUP/ DONOR CO-ORDINATION

The Friends of Albania (FoA) is an informal and open-ended group of interested donor countries and international organizations, which was established in September 1998 in order to reinforce and focus international support for Albania. The OSCE Head of Presence was tasked with chairing the FoA in Tirana. The FoA meets regularly on local level. The Group has rapidly established a position as the principal forum for international partners' co-ordination and international monitoring of economic and political reform in Albania. It also meets at international level under the co-chairmanship of the OSCE CiO and EU Presidency.

The Presence also helps to assess the various international commitments and activities underway (the "clearing-house" function), and facilitates regular meetings to review progress, bottlenecks and donor/government weaknesses in the implementation of programmes and projects.

HUMAN DIMENSION/NGO SUPPORT

The OSCE Presence in Albania works with national NGOs that are active in the areas of the Presence's mandate. The NGO strategy for the year 2001 consists of four major projects:

1. The creation of a comprehensive electronic database of international and national non-governmental organizations working in Albania (arranged by sector, geographical location and programmes).
2. The creation of a national network of Civil Society Development Centres (in partnership with the Netherlands Development Organization).
3. The continuation of the Women's Rights and Anti-Trafficking Education Project with the ODIHR (to raise awareness of target groups, such as teachers, social workers, healthcare providers, civil servants, attorneys and rural women, of the rights of Albanian women and of domestic violence and trafficking of human beings).
4. The mainstreaming of the OSCE Gender Action Plan, including gender awareness training into the Presence policies and procedures and into all Presence activities, both at headquarters and in the field.

PRESS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Press and Public Information Office's (PPIO) two main fields of activity are to promote the Presence's public policies, and to co-ordinate media development programmes (seminars, lectures, training, monitoring) for Albanian media personnel in order

to improve their professionalism, freedom and independence. The PPIO collaborates with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in Vienna and other Institutions and NGOs. The PPIO especially focuses on developments in Albanian media legislation and advises the institutional and political bodies concerned.

OSCE OFFICES IN ALBANIA



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