

The OSCE Presence in Albania – Raison d’Etre and Future Plans

Introduction

For centuries, the only people to whom the name “Albania” meant anything were military experts, diplomats and a handful of historians and linguists. Things have not changed much to this day. Though merely an hour or two by plane from the capitals of Central Europe, Albania remains largely terra incognita. During the 1990s, there were a few exceptional occasions when Albania impinged on public consciousness: firstly when, following the collapse of the dictatorship that will always be associated with the name of Enver Hoxha, tens of thousands of exhausted people attempted to flee to Italy aboard rusting ships; later, in relation to the nationwide unrest of 1997, caused by the collapse of several massive pyramid investment schemes; and finally, in the context of the Kosovo war, as hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Albanians sought refuge in northern Albania. However, following the apparent end of (or respite in) South-eastern Europe’s major interethnic conflicts, the interest in this region on the part of Western governments and the Western media has declined in favour of other parts of the globe. This is particularly true of Albania.

The history of Albania, which is situated in the far south-west of the Balkan peninsula, consists of a virtually unbroken chain of conquests by foreign rulers. Each of these left their mark on Albanian culture, combining to create an extremely distinctive whole. Archaic ways of life, which have survived in the inaccessible northern mountains in particular, are as much a part of Albania’s unique make-up as is the search for a new identity that has followed the fall of the dictatorship and the massive influx of Western information. These events ended the strict isolation in which generations of Albanians had been raised with a strong sense of national pride and a fixation on their own ethnicity, causing a major crisis for – and occasionally completely reversing – the positive image of what it means to be Albanian. In contemporary Albanian society, one thus finds aspects of traditional societies – such as the important place given to concepts such as pride, honour and vengeance (including blood vengeance) – combined with a strong desire to be included in the process of European integration as quickly and completely as possible, so that Albania can finally arrive where it has always geographically belonged: in Europe.

There can be no doubt that – taking into account the specific histories of the countries in the region – Albania has made more progress during the last decade than any other state. This point was made in early March 2003 by the

country's then Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Ilir Meta, at a meeting in Tirana with representatives of the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly. Among the OSCE parliamentarians present were representatives of three further transition countries: Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Romania. When asked about the particularities of Albania's situation, Meta stressed that one should not forget the unparalleled backwardness of the country (in European terms), which the Albanians have had to overcome since the overthrow of the dictatorship. The significant progress that has been made by the democratic Albania can only be measured against this specific history.

The OSCE Presence has been working in Albania since March 1997.¹ It has a broad mandate that encompasses promoting the rule of law, democratization, media development, human rights, monitoring the collection of small arms and light weapons and the preparation and monitoring of elections. Given the situation in which the OSCE Presence began its work, another important aspect of its mandate was defined as ensuring flexible co-ordination of the efforts of the international community. Intensive activities have been undertaken over the last few years in all areas of the mandate, as clearly shown in the two articles that have previously appeared in OSCE Yearbooks.²

The Current Situation in Albania

The election in summer 2002 of Alfred Moisiu as President of the Republic of Albania, the result of a remarkable agreement between the country's two leading political figures, Fatos Nano, the Chairman of the ruling Socialist Party, and Sali Berisha, his counterpart in the opposition Democratic Party, must be counted a great success in the struggle for political stability in Albania. Although this pact has occasionally faced fierce criticism, particularly from the smaller parties, it remains in place, more or less, to this day.³ And although recent times in particular have seen tensions rise sharply between Nano and Berisha and near insurmountable divisions emerge between the government and the opposition, it is clear that the consensus has brought significant progress, allowing the country to overcome a number of difficulties that were the result of political confrontation. For instance, the two-year boy-

1 Established by: OSCE, Permanent Council, Decision No. 160, PC.DEC/160, 27 March 1997; this decision is based on Decision No. 158, PC.DEC/158, 20 March 1997. The mandate was expanded in the following Decisions of the Permanent Council: Decision No. 206, PC.DEC/206, 11 December 1997; Decision No. 218, PC.DEC/218, 11 March 1998, as of October 2003.

2 Daan Everts, *The OSCE Presence in Albania*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 1999*, Baden-Baden 2000, pp 271-282, and Kathleen Imholz, *The OSCE Presence in Albania: From a State of Emergency to a Consolidated State*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2001*, Baden-Baden 2002, pp. 159-166.

3 As of October 2003.

cott of the municipal councils of Tirana and Durres by the Democratic Party was ended by this means in September 2002. A form of reconciliation was also achieved in the matter of the circumstances of the 1998 murder of the opposition leader Azem Hajdari and the possible role played in it by the state security service. Finally, it also proved possible to overcome apparently permanent obstacles standing in the way of electoral reform.

For ten years, the political climate in Albania was dominated by mutual distrust and conflict between the two main political groups; a sense of deadlock dominated in many areas. By achieving consensus as described above, it was possible to overcome this and set about performing critical outstanding tasks. These included the reform of electoral and property law – two areas in which the OSCE Presence is involved. We support dialogue and encourage compromise, promoting a political culture based on factual discussions.

Wide-ranging public debate at the end of 2002, provoked by the parliamentary examination of the 2003 budget, raised astonishingly complex questions: What are the government's major priorities? Is it capable of identifying projects, financing them and planning their execution competently and comprehensively? A thoroughgoing debate over state finances was thus held for the first time. The active participation of the opposition in this process demonstrated once more the potential benefits that Albania could expect to gain from normalized political relations and healthy competition. A number of procedural issues were discussed in detail during the debate, which led to improvements in the process of adopting a budget for the coming year. The OSCE once more provided expert advice to help make this process a success.

In the run-up to the campaign for the October 2003 local elections, the rivalries between government and opposition parties once more came to the fore, and power struggles between the wings of each party increased. This war particularly evident in relation to the question of property-law reform.

In the interest of strengthening the opposition – not to mention improving his own prospects – the opposition leader Sali Berisha intensified his attempts to unite all right-leaning groups in order to bring about a change of government. He turned first of all to former members of his own Democratic Party and to other parties within the “Union for Victory” coalition which had been formed to contest the parliamentary elections of 2001. His proposals aimed at creating a new party through the fusion of all Albania's centre-right parties, or, at the very least, to build a new, clearly positioned and therefore stronger coalition. To make his preferred option of creating a new party more attractive, Berisha also announced that he could even envisage the formation of a number of separate factions within the proposed party.

On several occasions during his time in office, President Moisiu has demonstrated his ability to mediate between the parties, thereby facilitating bipartisan agreement on several questions of fundamental reform. He has repeatedly emphasized the high priority he ascribes to outstanding reforms in areas such as electoral and property law and improvements to the legal sys-

tem and has actively supported efforts to achieve them. Despite frequent and open differences of opinion, there is no doubt that both sides have contributed to a historic success. At the very least, the principal goals of the 2002 agreement between Nano and Berisha have been achieved.

Recognizing the progress that has been made towards carrying out necessary reforms and securing political stability, Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, formally opened negotiations on the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Albania on 31 January 2003. This is, without a doubt, a milestone in the development of Albanian democracy and the country's international relations and ushers in a new phase in the transition process towards the adoption of European standards.

Subsequent months have shown, however, just how difficult the work of reform and reconstruction is. Albania has repeatedly been criticized by Brussels for dragging its feet in carrying out reforms in general, and in connection with fighting corruption and trafficking in human beings and drugs in particular.

There can be no doubt that Albania has made progress in the fight against corruption, organized crime and various forms of trafficking. Recent times, in particular, have seen a number of political initiatives. However, if there have been tangible successes in individual cases, the underlying problems have deeper roots and cannot be considered solved as long as the perpetrators are able to evade criminal prosecution and punishment. This is a symptom of the weakness of the Albanian criminal justice system. The report presented to Parliament by Albania's General Prosecutor in spring 2003 highlights these difficulties while representing at the same time the first step in developing a comprehensive strategy to reform the Albanian legal system in line with European standards.

The Consultative Task Force EU-Albania, part of the Stabilization and Association Process, met again in Tirana from 24-25 March 2003 to consider Albania's progress in fulfilling the conditions for the conclusion of a Stabilization and Association Agreement regarding the strengthening of the rule of law, including efforts to combat trafficking and organized crime. The second round of negotiations on the Stabilization and Association Agreement was held in Tirana on 25 March. This was followed by the publication of the European Commission's second annual report on the Stabilization and Association Process. The report's critical tone made it clear once again that the Albanian government has so far done too little to turn the Commission's recommendations into concrete action. It finds, among other things, that while the election of a president on the basis of bipartisan consensus has contributed substantially to political stability, this "has not yet translated into significant achievements in terms of reforms"⁴ of the kind that had been ex-

4 Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Paper, Albania, Stabilisation and Association Report 2003, Brussels, 26 March 2003, SEC(2003)339, p. 1, at: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/sap/rep2/com03_339_en.pdf.

pected. The Albanian government appears to attach appropriate weight to the report: Just one day after publication, the country's Council of Ministers adopted a number of concrete measures to tackle organized crime, trafficking and corruption and presented the appropriate draft laws to Parliament for approval. The package of measures included a proposal for reformed court procedure for serious crimes and amendments aimed at strengthening the law against money laundering.

Although the final results of the October 12 local elections were not available at the time of writing, there can be no doubt of the Socialist Party's victory. Colouring a map of Albania with the currently available election results, however, would demonstrate clearly that the borders of the traditional zones of influence – the Democratic Party in the north and the Socialist Party in the south – are less distinct than they were in the 2001 parliamentary elections. The opposition has gained support throughout the country, and the smaller parties, led by the Social Democratic Party, have emerged as a genuine third force. There is also a growing tendency for people to vote for individuals rather than for parties. This is an expression of Albanians' dissatisfaction with both the governing party's ineffective policies and the opposition's less than constructive approach. At 52 per cent, voter turnout is significantly lower than in the last elections – a sign of increasing election fatigue. Although the Election Monitoring Mission from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), vigorously supported by our Presence, noted that further progress has been made overall in adhering to international standards for the holding of democratic elections, it also drew attention to significant weaknesses that remain, in particular with regard to the quality of voter registers.⁵

The OSCE Today – Goals Achieved and Goals Outstanding

Despite justified criticisms, it is clear that Albania has entered a new phase of political consolidation and democratic development. The OSCE has not only followed the growth of political stability and democracy with sympathy and interest but its work has also helped to accelerate progress. Given the changed situation in the country, the OSCE Presence has for some time now been concerned with the question of whether we should limit our activities to a range of specific tasks in the future and how these should be defined.

Albania has been an OSCE participating State since 19 June 1991 and is represented in Vienna by a permanent delegation led by a diplomat with the rank of ambassador.

In the spring of 2002, the OSCE Presence in Albania came under sharp criticism from official Albanian quarters in connection with a meeting of the

5 Cf. Fourth Interim Report of the ODIHR Election Monitoring Mission, ODIHR.GAL/70/03, 24 October 2003.

“Friends of Albania” held in the Vienna Hofburg. The Friends of Albania was established in Tirana in 1998 by various countries that actively support Albania and other international participants. It met at regular intervals in Albania, where it was chaired by the Head of the OSCE Presence there, and in Vienna and Brussels under joint EU/OSCE chairmanship. Albania’s then Foreign Minister, Arta Dade, and Deputy Prime Minister, Skender Gjinushi, had expected the meetings to result in concrete promises of aid, which were, however, not forthcoming. In addition, Tirana had received an admonishment from Brussels only a few days previously: An EU report had criticized the lack of progress made towards political stabilization, the weakness of the rule of law and judicial inefficiency. This was also the tone of the 24 point final document produced by the Friends of Albania, in the formulation of which the Albanian representatives were given less say than they would have wished. “This group must cease to exist,” wrote Zef Mazi,⁶ Albania’s former OSCE Ambassador in Vienna, in a reply published in the Albanian newspaper *Shekulli*. The Friends of Albania reminded him “of London 1912 and the way Albania was treated then”.⁷ In that year, the European Great Powers drew the borders of the new state of Albania, temporarily establishing it as a military protectorate – largely over the heads of the Albanians. Mazi singled out the make-up of the Friends of Albania for particular criticism, claiming that the group contains not a few countries who have no real interest in Albania and pointing out, moreover, that Macedonia is a member: a country from which Albania would on no account accept advice.⁸

The resulting polemical campaign against not only the Friends of Albania, but also partly against the OSCE Presence in Albania, underlined once more how sensitively Albania needs to be treated as a result of its specific history. The principle of co-operation “as equal partners”, which implies advising rather than dictating terms, has thus proved indispensable for the success of our work.

The OSCE has engaged constructively and openly with the criticisms it has received. It began to reconsider its role and to set realistic and measurable goals – developing what amounts to a strategy for the OSCE Presence to gradually make itself superfluous – at the same time as the Presence had a change of leadership.

Since October 2002, our team has been headed by Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, an experienced Finnish diplomat. It counts very much in Ambassador Lipponen’s favour that he represents a small European country that nevertheless enjoys considerable political and economic success. The Am-

6 Zef Mazi had previously been the Head of Albania’s Permanent Delegation to the OSCE, at the time of publication of a series of critical articles written by him, however, he held a different position in Vienna. He has again been the Head of Albania’s Delegation in Vienna since the start of 2003.

7 Zef Mazi, Ambassador Ahrens dhe situata ne Shiperine, in: *Shekulli*, 1 April 2002 (author’s translation).

8 Cf. *ibid.*

bassador's sensitivity to the concerns of a small country was acknowledged at his very first round of high-level meetings following his appointment. President Moisiu, for example, explicitly mentioned the desire on the part of the Albanians to exchange personal views with Ambassador Lipponen.

When asked in a television interview what he had first done on arriving in Albania, Ambassador Lipponen answered as follows: "First of all I listened to my people. I had very intensive briefings and after that I had discussions with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the President. I had extremely intensive introductions to Albania and the Albanian politics [...] The role of the OSCE in Albania has been very strong and constructive. As far as I see, it is now becoming even more important and constructive than before. Of course, the times are changing, but with the excellent work the Presence is doing we have earned our role in the processes in Albania, but that role has to be earned every week. When it comes to my role, it is one of keeping the OSCE Presence's participation in the processes constructive, so that they result in the best possible product, if I can put it that way. My role is also to maintain the connection with the government and as much as possible with the international community so that the activities of all of us are harmonized."⁹

Ambassador Lipponen's first appearance before the OSCE's Permanent Council in early February 2003 provided an initial opportunity to take stock of the Presence's activities since his appointment. The Presence had already undertaken a comprehensive analysis, which was intended to provide the basis for improving the efficiency of its newly restructured departments.¹⁰ The Ambassador's summary of the work of the OSCE Presence in Albania met with broad approval in Vienna.

The Focus of Our Future Work

Following constructive discussions with the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and the Delegations of OSCE participating States in Vienna, in particular during the decision-making phase prior to approval of the annual budget, the Presence concentrated its work mainly on internal restructuring.

One consequence of this policy was the closing of three of the Presence's original eleven field stations in mid-December 2002. This slimming-down of the OSCE's network of Albanian offices to the most important areas reflects the improvement of the overall situation in the country. The Presence

9 Ambassador Osmo Lipponen during a television interview, TV Arberia, 19 March 2003, at: http://www.osce.org/documents/pia/2003/03/20_en.pdf.

10 OSCE Presence in Albania, Activity Report: September-December 02, SEC.FR/695/02, 19 December 2002. The head of the Albanian delegation, Ambassador Zef Mazi, also gave a positive overall view of the OSCE's recent activities in Albania in an interview with the Albanian daily newspaper Koha jone: Pse po sulmohet OSBE-ja, in: Koha jone, 27 April 2003.

has reoriented its activities and, in the future, will focus even more strongly on legislation and reform of the judicial system and on generally strengthening democratic processes by lending its expertise to support electoral law reform. Our additional priorities include border security issues, the fight against organized crime – especially trafficking in human beings – and providing the Albanian Parliament with expert advice and training. The Presence has adopted a project-oriented approach, which allows it to provide better support for democratic institutions and functions of government and makes it easier to measure results.¹¹

By concentrating on key activities and raising the efficiency of our work, we can ensure that the human, technical and – last but not least – financial resources available to us are employed even more effectively. To facilitate this, the Presence has been restructured: We have replaced the former flat management structure, which was characterized by numerous small and very small departments on the same level, with a structure based on five departments, each of which has a number of dependent specialized subunits. The core competencies of each department are reflected in the activities of the field stations, which are being increasingly involved in the work of the Presence.

The OSCE currently has over 30 international and almost 100 local staff members in Albania. Alongside our headquarters in Tirana, we operate field stations in Shkodra, Kukës, Peshkopi, Gjirokastra, Vlora and Elbasan¹² – most of which are staffed by two international mission members – and run a liaison office linking Tirana and Durres.

The field stations not only extend headquarters' reach throughout the country, but are also a key source of local information. No other international organization has a comparable network of field stations or is so deeply rooted in the country. Our field workers are trusted partners and contact persons in a broad range of matters. We have not always made the best possible use of this tremendous potential in the past. Weaknesses here have become particularly evident as we have tried to involve every staff member more closely in restructuring the Presence. The newly established departments now have the task of optimizing the involvement of the field stations, furthering their development and ensuring that they make use of their full potential.

The adoption of a new structure and the increasing focus on concrete and quantifiable project work required us first of all to rethink the way we

11 In this regard, Ambassador Zef Mazi responded to Ambassador Lipponen's statement at the Permanent Council on 6 February 2003 as follows: "We welcome the work the Presence is currently doing to restructure, to streamline and focus its activities. This has been a long-standing request from delegations of participating States and the Albanian authorities. The country has made significant progress in a number of fields." PC.DEL/108/03, 7 February 2003. See also: United States Mission to the OSCE, Statement of Response to the Head of Presence in Albania: "I would like to start by supporting the reorganization of the Presence as he has outlined in his report. We believe that it will contribute to the effectiveness of the Presence." PC.DL/110/03, 7 February 2003.

12 As of October 2003; the number of field stations was further reduced by the end of 2003.

operate ourselves. The key qualities required are more individual initiative, creativity, personal responsibility and team spirit.

The process of drafting and discussing “vision papers” for the various departments sometimes almost verged on the painful and certainly involved a steep learning curve for everyone. The results of this process will – following intensive consultation with the Albanians and the delegations in Vienna – be the basis of our future activities. The process has delivered a demanding set of objectives. The priorities of our future work are as follows:

- Support for the legal system
- Property legislation
- Reforming electoral law
- Supporting the national strategy for combating trafficking in human beings
- Establishing a witness protection programme
- Intensifying the co-ordination of police activities in cross-border zones
- Monitoring the collection of small arms, light weapons and ammunition
- Strengthening civil society
- Helping to raise the quality of the work of the Albanian Parliament
- Media development.

The restructuring process has led the Presence to develop a more analytical style of working and reporting. Since Albania has successfully negotiated the phase of establishing a democratic state, the activities of the Presence that aim to further the democratic development of the new state institutions take on even more importance.

The following sections profile in detail two departments whose activities are particularly central to the work of the OSCE in Albania.

The Rule of Law and Human Rights Department

As a result of calls from both the international community and Albanian circles for the prioritizing of legal reform, the Rule of Law and Human Rights Department began by undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the state of the Albanian legal system. By showing up current weaknesses, this aims to assist in the development of a national strategy for the reform of the Albanian judiciary. As soon as the report is complete,¹³ it will be presented to the Albanian government and to international partners to help them identify more easily and rapidly areas in which concrete projects can be undertaken.

The inadequate prosecution of organized crime is an issue of particular importance. Although numerous reports by the Presence have cited with praise the growing number of convictions of people involved in human traf-

13 The report will be published in 2004 in both English and Albanian: OSCE, Legal Sector Report for Albania, Tirana 2004 (ISBN 99927-972-0-7).

ficking, figures recently released by Albania's General Prosecutor reveal that those convicted represent only a small proportion of those charged with such crimes. The General Prosecutor's October 2002 report to Parliament recorded that, in that year, only eight of the 72 charges of involvement in drug trafficking had resulted in a court case. The report also noted that few if any drug cases heard in Albania ultimately resulted in a conviction – a fact that contrasts sharply with the large number of Albanians convicted of drug offences in Western Europe, and in Italy in particular.¹⁴

The report makes clear that despite the fact that the police have recently begun to achieve results in combating human trafficking, little has so far been done to counter the trade in hard drugs. The report also mentions failings in the prosecution of serious crime.

Since then, General Prosecutor Theodhori Sollaku has given an interview to an Albanian newspaper in which he summed up his experience after one year in the job. Whilst stressing his unwavering intention to declare war on organized crime, he also noted that his ability to act required the courts to reliably perform their preliminary work. In the same interview, General Prosecutor Sollaku stated that, since he took office, 250 state prosecutors have examined 14,000 cases involving 9,000 suspects, leading to 4,300 arrests. During this one year, 336 charges were made involving drugs, of which 130 resulted in a court case. The number of cases of money laundering rose significantly over the period covered by the report. This is attributed to an unstable banking sector, an inadequate tax system, trafficking and corruption.¹⁵

The Presence has continued its successful co-operation with the office of the minister responsible for the implementation of the national strategy to combat trafficking in human beings. Via our network of field stations, we maintain close relations with local representatives of the anti-trafficking teams of the Albanian police and with district prosecutors. Our experience with the Albanian justice system and the administration of justice led directly to the creation of a witness protection unit and to the development of a victim-support project, which was launched in September 2002. This project aims at establishing a unit within the Albanian police to identify victims of human trafficking who have been sent back to Albania and making sure they are provided with comprehensive information on their rights as well as appropriate advice. As a first step towards reintegrating the victims into Albanian society, the project aims to keep them out of the clutches of their former tormentors, who are often only waiting for the girls to return to Albania before getting hold of them once more and continuing their illegal exploitation. The project was made possible by start-up funds from ODIHR. Some 50

14 Cf. Office of the General Prosecutor. Report of the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Albania on the State of Criminality in Albania for the Period 1 January-30 September 2002, 28 October 2002.

15 Cf. interview with General Prosecutor Theodhori Sollaku, in: *Koha jone*, 2 April 2003.

former victims of human trafficking have already been helped by a joint OSCE and IOM (International Organization for Migration) team. The second phase of this project will be to create and train the special unit within the Albanian police.

The search for a long overdue solution to the problem of property law has recently taken on a political dimension. Because of the complexity of this issue and the inherent danger that negotiations could collapse completely, destroying the consensus between the two camps, the Presence has increased its efforts in this area. We are not only providing expert assistance, but are also mediating between the parties. The establishment of a parliamentary commission for property legislation in April 2002 was the first positive result of our efforts. The courts are overwhelmed with a backlog of unresolved property cases: Some statistics put the figure as high as 40 to 50 per cent of all outstanding cases. The OSCE has presented its recommendations on a draft law on property restitution and the payment of compensation to the legal owners, and this is due to be discussed by the parliamentary commission. However, in a newspaper interview, Maksim Begeja, deputy chairman of the Republican Party Parliamentary Group and one of Albania's leading property legislation activists, stressed that there are many issues which remain to be resolved and noted that the commentaries on the draft law also require thoroughgoing discussion. Nevertheless, the right to private property – which is acknowledged worldwide – must not be called into question. As soon as Albania joins the rest of the world by securing existing property rights, foreign investors will also be more likely to invest in Albania.¹⁶

Democratization Department

Activities relating to democratization and the development of civil society certainly count among our Presence's most important tasks. The Democratization Department supported the Bipartisan Committee for the Implementation of the ODIHR recommendations on electoral legislation. This comprised round-table discussions, consultation with international experts and – not least importantly – negotiation and mediation at the highest political level. All in all, this brought about an improvement in the legal and administrative basis for holding democratic elections. It is true, however, that a great deal remains to be done, especially with regard to the register of voters.

The Presence is also involved in a number of concrete projects. One of the most important seeks to support the work of the Albanian Parliament. Given the fundamental role of the Parliament, particularly regarding its executive responsibility, the Presence has made a major effort to improve the way it scrutinizes and approves the state budget. As a result of our work with

16 Cf. Republican Lawmaker on OSCE Draft of Property Restitution, in: Albanian Daily News, 10 April 2003.

the Committee on Economic Issues, Finance and Privatization, concrete steps were taken in preparing to overhaul laws relating to the national budget.

One of our goals here is to extend the time available to Parliament to discuss the budget, which is currently limited to one month. A further aim is to ensure that Parliament is involved in the budget-planning process from the start. This project also covers the provision of a range of training opportunities for the parliamentary administration, which are designed not only to help improve the quality of its work, but also to support the reform process in this area in general.

The Democratization Department includes a Media Development Unit. The Presence, working closely with external partners, provided Albania's National Council for Radio and Television with expert support for the creation of a frequency map – an overview of all broadcasting frequencies in use. This is the first time an exact overview of all television stations, their broadcast ranges, technical specifications and potential interference between broadcasters has been drawn up. There are currently more than 50 television stations in Albania. Their legality is frequently doubtful and their operating ranges are unregulated. In the future, television broadcasting should be restricted to those possessing a valid licence issued by the National Council for Radio and Television. In relation to this issue, the Presence has actively supported the parliamentary committee on mass media; assistance has also been promised by the office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in Vienna.

The OSCE and its international partners have so far opened five Civil Society Development Centres at locations throughout Albania. More are set to follow during 2004. By supporting the heads of these centres in developing business strategies and marketing skills, we aim to ensure their future financial autonomy and independence.

Our Women's Rights and Anti-Trafficking Education (WRATE) project has initially focused on raising public awareness of women's issues, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas. More than 1,500 people, mainly teachers and NGO representatives, but also students and young women from rural areas, have taken part in our seminars so far.

Albania's economic and environmental problems are fundamental and readily apparent. Despite this, the OSCE's activities in these areas had been declining in the recent past and had, for a number of reasons, slipped from the centre of attention. This situation has since been remedied. The Economics and Environment Unit is now the first OSCE centre to be headed by an indigenous specialist. She enjoys high regard both among our Albanian partners and within the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities in Vienna and was to a great extent personally responsible for translating Transparency International's anti-corruption handbook into

Albanian.¹⁷ We consider this to be a useful instrument for the Albanian government's work of developing an anti-corruption strategy – a task we are actively supporting with all the means at our disposal.

We have implemented a very successful training project for the Albanian Ministry of Finance, which focuses mainly on the development of analytical skills, but also lays considerable stress on practical instruction in the use of a software application designed to help fight money laundering. In addition, the Presence is supporting and performing mediation within the scope of the constructive dialogue between the Albanian government and national and international business associations through a project on the status and feasibility of free-trade zones.

Outlook

While we can look back on months of intensive activity, we know that the bulk of our work still lies ahead. We are currently holding constructive discussions with our Albanian partners in order to set our priorities for 2004. What Albania expects of us was already made clear in the statement by the Head of the Albanian Delegation to the OSCE on the occasion of Ambassador Lipponen's February 2003 appearance in Vienna: concentration on key priorities and measurable, project-oriented work.¹⁸

We share the view of the other OSCE missions to the Balkans that a great deal has been achieved in this troubled region of Europe in recent years. In his address at the South Eastern European Co-operation Process (SEEC) summit, which was held in Belgrade in April 2003 and attended by the Presidents of South-eastern European states, the OSCE's Secretary General emphasized the importance attributed by the OSCE to successful regional co-operation in the fight against organized crime and trafficking in drugs and human beings in South-eastern Europe.¹⁹ Also in this connection, the OSCE missions to the Balkans will remain of vital importance – whatever form they take in the future. Not only because of the practical assistance they provide to countries in transition as they negotiate their way to stability and democracy, but also – and not least of all – because of the helping hand they give on the way towards EU membership.

17 Cf. Transparency International (ed.), *Source Book on Confronting Corruption: the Elements of a National Integrity System*, translated into Albanian by the OSCE Presence in Albania, September 2002.

18 Ambassador Zef Mazi in response to Ambassador Lipponen's statement at the Permanent Council on 6 February 2003: "However, we would be in favour of continued work to further streamline and focus the Presence's activities, including with a project-oriented approach. There is room for this. This should principally go in line with priorities and views of the host country." PC.DEL/108/03, cited above (Note 10).

19 Cf. Address by Ambassador Jan Kubis at the SEEC Summit, Belgrade, 9 April 2003, SEC.GAL/68/03, 10 April 2003.

With this in mind, I think it is appropriate for me to end – and to end looking forward – by quoting the 2003 OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Dutch Foreign Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: “OSCE Missions help to speed up the necessary internal transition process, and increase respect for and compliance with OSCE commitments. Instead of a gatekeeper, I see an OSCE Mission as more of a locksmith helping to unlock a door that was jammed.”²⁰

20 Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Heads of Mission Meeting, Vienna, 13 January 2003, AVT02/BZ 69239.