



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Lipponen, Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 20, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My delegation also welcomes Ambassador Lipponen here in the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his report. We strongly support his work, and the work of the Presence staff in Albania.

The Presence and ODIHR have made a contribution to the election reform process in Albania and we agree with the generally positive assessment of the head of ODIHR's election observation mission, Ambassador Barry, of the conduct of the pre-election period and the polling on election day. We are concerned however about negative developments since the elections, including irregularities in the re-runs last Sunday in Himara. We support the continued work of the Presence and ODIHR on elections reform, and hope that shortcomings can be overcome before the next parliamentary elections.

We also hope that the current political situation concerning cabinet appointments can be overcome in a democratic and legal manner.

We support the Presence's work on parliamentary training, judicial reform, property restitution, media, and civil society development. We hope that the Presence will continue its work to fight corruption and trafficking.

We note that Albania has made significant progress in combating trafficking in persons. The Mirage II operation conducted in September resulted in many arrests but the real success of that operation will only be demonstrated through subsequent prosecutions.

Again, we thank Ambassador Lipponen for his work, and look forward to continuing constructive work of the Presence in Albania.

Thank you.