



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to HOP Albania Ambassador Lipponen

As delivered by Political Counselor Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 30, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We very warmly welcome the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Lipponen, for his last appearance here in the Permanent Council and we are certain that he will receive a very warm welcome in New York when he takes up his next assignment

We thank Ambassador Lipponen for his work over the past two years. We believe his work together with the Government of Albania has facilitated reform.

We continue to support the Presence's invaluable work on electoral reform. We believe the OSCE and ODHIR are providing vital assistance to Albania as it continues to work on reforming its electoral procedures and strengthening rule of law. We hope that all political parties will work together to move forward with this process well in advance of next year's elections. In particular, we hope agreement can be reached on ensuring an unbiased Central Electoral Commission and on improving the voter lists.

We also believe that the parliamentary support program is extremely useful.

We continue to support the Presence's concrete assistance to Albania concerning property restitution. We note that new legislation recently came into effect, and look forward to its effective implementation.

We also strongly support the Presence's anti-trafficking programs. Working together with the Presence, other international organizations, and NGOs, the government of Albania is making progress towards fighting this international scourge. We would note, however, our concern over one recent case in which charges against an individual accused of trafficking a girl – who was 13 at the time of her initial trafficking – were dropped with insufficient explanation. Effective prosecution of traffickers is vital to fighting this crime, and we must all work to ensure that our judicial systems are strong and independent in this regard.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, we'd also like to welcome Ambassador Vacek as he takes up his duties as the Head of the Presence in Albania.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.