

**Inauguration of the construction of new Serious Crime Court building in Tirana
Tirana, 5 February 2010**

Your Excellency, the Minister of Justice,
Honourable Chief Justices,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Works for this Court began in April 2007, and I was here when the first brick was laid. The process that we have gone through over these nearly three years has not always been simple. I am ever so pleased to see today that the Serious Crimes Court building provides the necessary physical conditions for an important part of the judiciary and that both court and prosecution staff are now using it at full capacity.

The construction of the Serious Crime Court building was made possible through EU assistance worth €6.5 million. The European Commission has assisted Albania with millions of euros elsewhere to improve court infrastructure. The results of that assistance can be clearly seen in the renovated and reconstructed courts of Dibra, Vlora, Saranda, Korca, and other works.

Court infrastructure in general nevertheless remains poor, says the European Commission 2009 Progress Report for Albania. Sessions in judges' offices and lack of public access to court hearings are often getting in the way of efficiency, transparency, respect of procedures and rights of parties involved. Clearly, more investments are needed.

But an adequate court infrastructure is not enough to overcome the weaknesses in the Albanian judiciary and to help it serve Albania's citizens well. Good working conditions alone are not enough to deal with the shortcomings in transparency and efficiency, and even less so with the shortcomings in independence of the justice system noted in the Progress Report.

A comprehensive strategy to improve the judicial system is required to enable

progress in this sense. A comprehensive strategy that reflects the political will of all political actors and forces to agree on the basic "rules of the game" that apply to all citizens of a country equally and determine their quality of life. It is a political challenge to find the right balance between the need to preserve - and sometimes strengthen - the independence of judicial institutions on the one hand, and the need to ensure appropriate accountability on the other. There is no such thing as a "majority" rule of law or an "opposition" rule of law. Logically, therefore, many pieces of reform legislation can only be adopted with qualified majorities in Parliament, and there is a need for political dialogue in Parliament.

Albania will have the opportunity to demonstrate that it can get the balance right on a few occasions that will come up in the course of this year.

Above and beyond adequate infrastructure, and depoliticised, independent and accountable institutions there is another element that I believe is essential for the functioning of an impartial justice in a democratic society: the human factor.

The "rule of law" is implemented by real-life people. The best "rules of the game" will have only little impact on public and private life unless law enforcement officers, prosecutors, lawyers, judges have the required professional capacities, unless they have the will to work for the "rule of law" as a public good, courageously at all times and irrespective of their political convictions or of any economic or other personal interest.

Turning again to the new building: We look forward to the rigorous and timely treatment of serious crime cases in our Progress Reports, to impartial rulings, and to their correct enforcement. In this sense, I would like to extend my best wishes for the success of their work to all of you, who will work in the Serious Crime Court as part of Albania's justice system for the benefit of Albanian society.

Thank you for your kind attention.