

**Statement of Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin, Ranking Member  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

**Hearing: Advancing Democracy in Albania  
July 20, 2004**

I appreciate the opportunity this hearing provides to examine developments in Albania today.

Thirty years ago, Albania was the one country invited to participate in what was then the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe – now the OSCE – that chose not to do so. At the time, the communist regime in Albania claimed the Helsinki Process to be part of some Soviet-American conspiracy to keep Europe divided. As the Helsinki Process worked instead to reunite an artificially divided Europe, the people of Albania pressed for democratic change and sought to rejoin the affairs of their home continent. Since 1991, Albania has been a welcomed friend in what is now the OSCE.

I am glad to learn, as Ambassador Lipponen can detail here today, that the OSCE is also playing a valuable role in assisting Albania as it goes through its transition period. Transition has been particularly difficult for Albania, first due to the extremely repressive system from which it had to emerge, but also due to the decade of conflict taking place in nearby and sometimes neighboring countries.

As a lawmaker as well as a lawyer, I have a particular interest in issues relating to the rule of law. These issues, of course, are of major consequence in Albania. Adherence to the rule of law, manifested in professional law enforcement and an impartial judicial system, are critical if a country is to be genuinely democratic. I would hope our witnesses today will inform us on what is being done to assist Albania in this regard.

In conclusion, let me also express my support for holding this hearing, which is an example of taking the Commission mandate seriously and reviewing the implementation records of all participating States, even those like Albania who have very good relations with the United States. Indeed, much of the Commission's time this year has been compelled to focus on the U.S. record. Hopefully, by shedding additional light on the issues of continued concern, we will also be encouraging the progress in human rights we all desire.