



organization for security and co-operation in europe

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**FINAL REPORT
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA
29 JUNE - 6 JULY 1997**

This final report was foreseen in the Political Contract of 9 May 1997 signed by the main political parties. Based on the findings of international observers, we are confident to say that, in our judgement, these elections can be deemed as acceptable given the prevailing circumstances. They should constitute the foundation for a strong, democratic system that the Albanians want and deserve.

During the first and second round, irregularities were observed which were, in a few cases, serious ones. A final technical assessment containing a more detailed analysis of the whole electoral process and recommendations will be released by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE after the final round has been completed¹. It is up to the Albania judicial system to process complaints in accordance with the domestic legislation.

Pre-election Period

The pre-election period was marked by a number of problems, mainly stemming from the overall situation in the country. The security conditions, in particular, made normal

¹ The election process could not be completed after the second round, due to some of the problems identified in this report. However, the few expected run-offs can neither change the overall outcome of the election, nor the main conclusions drawn from the observation.

technical preparations and observations difficult in the extreme. The presence of the Multinational Protection Force helped to improve the security situation, thereby allowing the elections to take place.

These problems were mainly of a procedural nature, relating to the inability to strictly observe the timetable set forth in the Electoral Law. As a result, the necessary flow of information to the electorate was uneven throughout the country. In some cases, voters were not sufficiently informed to be able to objectively select among the candidates.

This, coupled with the serious hindrances in campaigning, particularly in the South, brought about by the security situation, made normal preparations for the elections extremely difficult.

However, the Albanian authorities responsible for the administration of the election, particularly the Central Election Commission, displayed a high degree of commitment and responsibility in seeking to overcome the very real problems facing them.

In particular, the following significant difficulties were observed:

- ❑ The Electoral Commissions, both in the electoral zones and in the polling stations, became operational at a very late stage in most areas.
- ❑ The voters' lists were not completed on time. In several polling stations, no voters' lists at all were available for the first round.
- ❑ The list of candidates was established at a very late stage in several electoral zones, and was forwarded to the Central Election Commission at the very last moment.
- ❑ The late printing of the ballot papers and the distribution of election material also caused serious delays, resulting in several polling stations not receiving them in time for the first round.
- ❑ The opening and closing hours of the polling stations were changed only the day before the first round by a ruling of the Constitutional Court. This change had been held up for some time, seemingly for political reasons.

Media

The State TV and Radio followed the election law and the media guidelines issued by the Central Election Commission on 31 May 1997. The monitoring resented to the OSCE by the *Osservatorio di Pavia*, an Italian media research institute, indicated an overall fair coverage of the campaign by the State TV in terms of airtime. There have, -however, been reports that indicate footage of rallies by one party were taken from last year where crowds were significantly larger.

Compared to the State TV, the influence of print media on public opinion is relatively limited. It remains split into the two major political camps. The largest dailies are still either political party publications or nominally independent papers that demonstrate strong political bias. It has to be noted, however, that in the aftermath of the recent

political crisis, the independent print media became more diversified. However, technical difficulties and distribution problems prevented circulation to a large part of the population.

Coverage of the campaign in many parts of the country was limited by crime-related thefts of reporters' cars and equipment.

First Round

Although great difficulties in the weeks before the election caused many observers to doubt the ability of the Albanian authorities to conduct a successful election, the large turnout of voters (73%) demonstrated that Albania, in close co-operation with the OSCE, was able to organize the voting day in a reasonably orderly fashion. On the same day, a referendum on the question of Constitutional Monarchy took place. This referendum, which the OSCE had recommended should be held on a separate date, did not fall within the OSCE's mandate.

Despite the logistical difficulties reported above, a vast majority of the 4,500 polling stations were in operation on election day, although in some cases opening late. Diaspora voters were allowed to return home to cast their ballots.

Over 500 short-term observers, including 112 parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Assembly and various national parliaments, were deployed in more than 250 teams, covering a high percentage of the voting population. They were able to visit polling stations, witness the counting of ballots and freely interview voters. The co-operation of the polling stations commissions with observers was on the whole excellent. Although observers' findings will be presented in a more systematic manner in the final technical assessment, one may draw some conclusions at this stage:

- ❑ The vast majority of the observation reports indicate that the voting procedures were being followed in a good or very good manner.
- ❑ In areas where there were difficulties, the majority of the problems were ballots not stamped or signed family voting and ballot box seals not properly affixed. These cannot be considered as serious violations. It was only in a small percentage of cases that the difficulties could be described as acute.
- ❑ The quality of the security at polling stations was generally described as good. However, there were incidents, including the seemingly election-related murder of one polling station official, which is to be condemned.
- ❑ The counting and tabulation process was very slow and problematic. There were instances of manipulation and intimidation at the Zonal Electoral Commission level; these serious irregularities, although of no implication on the overall results are to be deplored and, eventually, corrected through the normal judicial procedures. The Central Election Commission was hampered in its work by the, in some instances, deliberately slow transmission of result protocols from the Zones. Serious lack of transparency and missed deadlines made the timely preparation for the second round difficult.

Second Round

On 6 July, a second round took place in 32 zones. In addition, one zone held a first round election. This followed a week of some tension, including a serious shooting incident during a rally. One person was killed and a number of people injured. The second round was monitored by over 150 short-term observers, including parliamentarians from the Council of Europe and the Italian Parliament, who covered all contested zones. Over 600 polling stations were visited during the day and many were returned to in the evening for observation of the vote count.

The hours of polling went calmly with a voter turnout below that of the previous week. A number of minor incidents were reported but generally there was no deterioration in the situation reported during the first round. Again, we have to condemn the killing of two election officials during this round. Overall, observers indicated that there were no serious technical violations of the voting process.

Conclusions

We believe, therefore, that we can say that the elections can be deemed as acceptable, given the prevailing circumstances, because:

- of the large participation of voters, in particular during the first round
- voters were generally able to cast their ballot without fear or intimidation
- the conduct of the electoral commissions appears to have been, apart from a relatively small number of incidents, correct and impartial. Domestic and international observers were, for the most part, granted access to all stages of the voting and counting without interference or intimidation.

The results of these elections should be the foundation for a strong, democratic system, which Albanians want and deserve. It is, however, essential that all Albanian political parties observe the commitments they have made to respect the results of the elections. We recall that the international community expects a major effort towards national reconciliation after the elections. Without such reconciliation, there will be no basis for defining the terms of international aid, and the continued support of the international community.

We should like to commend the OSCE, and in particular the efforts of Dr. Franz Vranitzky, the Multinational Protection Force, as well as the Council of Europe and the European Union for the tremendous contribution that they have made to the international effort to help build democracy in Albania.

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