



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OBSERVATION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HELD IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

MAY 26 and JUNE 2, 1996

I. INTRODUCTION

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) dispatched three representatives to Albania in late April to serve as long-term observers for the Albanian Parliamentary Elections on May 26. They included the On Site Co-ordinator, Mr. Anders Eriksson (Sweden), Eugenio Polizzi (Italy) and Mark Power-Stevens (United Kingdom). The ODIHR representatives observed the pre-election process and the first round of balloting during the period April 25 - May 29, 1996. This report focuses primarily on the first round of balloting. However, ODIHR did maintain a limited presence in Albania for the second round run-off elections on June 2nd.

Upon arrival in Albania, ODIHR representatives established contact with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Central Election Commission (CEC), the Ministry for Local Government, the Verification Commission, a number of prefectures, all major political parties, Embassies of OSCE participating States, and domestic and international non-governmental organisations. According to their terms of reference as outlined in the OSCE / ODIHR election observation framework document, ODIHR representatives monitored the pre-election period and facilitated the accreditation and deployment of approximately 50 short-term observers.

Short-term observers represented 11 OSCE participating States including Canada, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

The short-term observers arrived in Tirana 3-7 days before election day. Some of the short-term observers were utilised for observing rallies and other pre-election events.

ODIHR representatives organised a thorough briefing session for all short-term observers. Also participating in the briefings were observers deployed by the Embassy of the United States, the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM), British Helsinki Human Rights Group, and representatives of the Sanctions Assistance Mission (SAM).

Observers were deployed to 18 different areas of the country including the capital Tirana, covering more than half of the 115 election zones. The teams visited more than 300 polling

stations during the election day, which corresponds to approximately 7% of the total number of polling stations. They covered also the counting process in at least one polling station per team.

The embassies of participating States assisted with logistical support by providing many of the cars and interpreters.

All observation teams returned to Tirana to participate in a de-briefing seminar on Monday May 27, where they reported on their findings.

In accordance with the framework document, a post-election statement was published in Vienna on May 29, 1996, after first having informed the Chairman in Office. The statement was circulated to all delegations.

I.i Conclusions of the Observation

The conclusion of the observer mission was that in many instances the implementation of the election law failed to meet its own criteria. More specifically, 32 articles out of 79 dealing with the pre-election period and election day were violated. They include articles 4, 13, 16, 19, 21, 22, 28, 29, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 44, 48, 51, 53, 56, 57, 60, 63, 64, 66, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, and 75.

In reference to the OSCE election related commitments, five out of nine articles under paragraph 7 of the Copenhagen Document were not met including 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8. Article 8 dealing with both domestic and international observers was not fully met.

I.ii ODIHR/OSCE Pre-Election Assessment, March 1996

As a result of an ODIHR pre-election assessment mission undertaken to Albania in March a number of positive aspects in Albania's election laws were specifically cited. These included the participation of political parties on election commissions at all levels and access to the voting day process by foreign and domestic observers. All political parties represented in the polling station commission have the right to have a copy of the official record of the final results. Voter lists are open for public scrutiny thirty days before election day, and it is possible for the voters to correct errors in the voter registration lists.

Other positive aspects include the right of parties and citizens to hold public meetings and the inclusion of penalties for voter fraud. The election law also protects the right of candidates and parties to campaign freely in the media either through allotted time slots or paid advertising. The parties are also, to some extent, financed by the authorities during the election.

These measures were cited as enhancing public confidence in the integrity of the process, but only as long as the law was administered accordingly. However, while these positive aspects in Albania's election law were cited, it should be noted that the administration of the election seriously departed from the election law. Some practices observed cannot be considered in line with either Albania's Election Law or the OSCE election-related commitments.

I.iii Official Co-operation with the OSCE/ODIHR Observer Mission

ODIHR regrets that the level of official co-operation offered to its representatives by the various election and government authorities was of such a limited nature. Requested meetings were often cancelled and the failure of the authorities to provide information at all, or in a timely manner, presented an obstruction to the work of the observation mission. The accreditation of some observers was delayed until the day before the election causing problems to the original deployment plans.

The CEC claimed to be unable to furnish the observation mission with clear information relating to the addresses of polling stations. Failure to supply such basic and vital information to the observer mission could only be interpreted as either a failure to cooperate with observers or as a lack of central authority and organisation within the CEC.

II. PRE-ELECTION PROCESS

The announcement by the President of an election date at the last possible moment for compliance with the establishment of a Central Election Commission "no later than 45 days before the election day", as cited in the election law, had a detrimental effect on the pre-election process. By allowing just 45 days for all the electoral arrangements, it was noted that many of the deadlines in the law were missed and many procedures were not properly followed due to the severe time constraints.

II.i The New Election Law and Redistricting of Election Zones

Albania's new election law divides the election map into 115 zones (constituencies), to be determined by the President no later than 45 days before election day. The new election law increases the number of single mandate districts to be decided by majority vote from 100 to 115. One deputy is elected from each constituency. To be successful in the first round of voting a candidate must secure 50% plus one vote. If no candidate manages this then a second round is scheduled to take place one week later involving the two top candidates from the first round. At this stage simple majority will suffice. At the same time the new law reduces the number of proportional seats, with the whole country as one constituency, from 40 to 25.

New election zone boundaries had to be drawn in conformity with the new law. In order to establish 15 new zones and still maintain an equal number of voters in each zone, redistricting should have ensured approximately 18,000 voters in each zone. However, the size of the electorate in the newly established zones ranged from 12,000 to 27,000. This disparity is too wide to ensure the same weight for all casted votes.

The new zones were approved by the President in a very non-transparent manner and without public discussion or consultation with opposition political parties, and it is impossible to establish if redefinition was elaborated by taking into account some politically neutral criteria or in a selective and biased manner.

In addition, 45 days is a short period of time for the political parties to adjust to the newly established zones. The delimitation of the new zones should have been made public earlier, and the process of establishing the new zones more inclusive and transparent.

Potential candidates need to collect " a list signed by no less than 400 voters in the respective zone, which support the candidate in the zone." For political parties nominating candidates in all 115 zones, this requires 46,000 signatures. When the zones are not delineated until 45 days in advance of the election, this places undue burden on parties to nominate and register candidates.

II.ii Establishment of Election Commissions

The election administration in Albania is divided into three levels; the central Election Commission (CEC) which is appointed no later than 45 days prior to the election day; 115 zone commissions which shall be established no later than 30 days before the election day; 4703 polling stations commissions which shall be established no later than 25 days before election day. In total, the number of officials needed to implement the election according to the law exceeded 50,000 people.

The establishment of the CEC just 45 days before the election made it very difficult to identify election officials, and still meet the deadlines contained in the law pertaining to the establishment of election commissions at the zone and polling station level. According to observers, it seemed that the CEC was overloaded by the administrative task of organising the election in such a short time period.

In addition to the observers opinion that the CEC was faced with an administrative overload, it also seemed to lack authority. This came to light with the failure of certain Zone Commissions to issue domestic observers with accreditation in three areas of the country including the capital Tirana. This occurred despite the CEC's claim that they issued a decision granting the accreditation of all domestic observers. The last-minute denial of accreditation to domestic observers at the Zone Commission level did not assist confidence in the election process.

In another incident a candidate in Sarande was refused permission to stand in the election by the Zone Commission despite written confirmation from the CEC and Constitutional Court that she was clear to stand.

II.iii The Verification Committee

The Verification Committee was established to review the communist era police files for all persons nominated as candidates according to the laws "On Genocide and crimes Against Humanity" and "On the Control of the Figure of Officials", numbers 8001 and 8043 respectively. Persons implicated by these laws are barred from holding public office until the year 2005.

The Verification Committee recommended the disqualification of approximately 200 people as candidates in the election. Most disqualifications were made under article 2C, relating to those persons registered in the list of Segurimi (former Secret Police) as past informers. Some 60 persons appealed to the Court of Cassation and nine appeals were upheld. All others were rejected.

The manner in which potential candidates were disqualified contradicts article 7.5 of the Copenhagen Document guaranteeing to "respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organisations, without discrimination".

The laws concerning the restriction for candidates to run for the Parliament contain particular areas of concern:

- six out of seven members of the committee are appointed by the government, which raises questions about the impartiality of members of the commission;
- there is concern that a government appointed committee may determine which candidate records to scrutinize in a selective manner, whereas the law could be applied in a uniform manner where the past records of all candidates are scrutinised;
- the decisions in the committee are taken by majority vote, which raises the question that the committee may be serving in a semi-judicial capacity, while Constitutional articles ban the creation of special courts;
- all meetings were held behind closed doors;
- the time was too short between the decision of the court and the election day, and could have left insufficient time for disqualified candidates to make an appeal.

II.iv Participation of Political Parties

While the banning of candidates by the Verification Committee did place an extra burden on political parties in the election, and is an issue of concern for individual human rights, none of the parties complained that this caused insurmountable problems for their participation in the process.

Some 24 parties fielded candidates in the election. Under Article 15 of the Law however not all those were able to submit a list for the 25 proportional seats which is limited to those parties which have fielded candidates in not less than 38 election zones and in 12 districts of the country.

Some of the smaller parties did complain about their exclusion from the proportional lists. The CEC stated that in these instances the lists were not submitted 30 days before the election day as stipulated in Article 15.

II.v Registration of Candidates

According to the law all candidates shall register their candidature to the commission of the electoral zone. The CEC shall announce the name and political party of the candidates no later than 25 days before election day.

This criteria was not fulfilled. According to the CEC the reason for this was some late appeals to the Cassation Court from disqualified candidates. The candidates were under investigation according to the Lustration law. However, despite the late publication of the final lists the electorate had the opportunity to see the lists sufficiently prior to the election day.

A more serious issue raised by observers was that according to Article 19 of the Election Law, some persons including heads of organs dealing with public order and the National Information Service must leave their jobs 25 days before the election day if they are registered as candidates for parliament. Persons subject to this article were still active in their capacities throughout the election process despite the fact they were running as candidates.

The president was also a candidate on the proportional list which is not in accordance with the Albanian constitution. A cornerstone in building public confidence in the electoral process is that all official persons act according to the laws of the country.

II.vi Voter Register

The voter register is to be made public no later than 30 days before election day. All Albanian citizens who have reached the age of 18 on election day have the right to vote, although there are some exceptions for persons in legal detention and the mentally ill. There is no provision for Albanian citizens to vote abroad.

According to observation findings, many lists were not published in time and there was widespread concern over the accuracy of the voter register. The voter register contained people already deceased, those who had not yet reached 18 years of age and sometimes the same name appeared on more than one list.

These problems are even more disturbing considering the fact that ODIHR representatives were assured in March by representatives of the Ministry for Local Government that the lists would be accurate, were in the process of being computerised, and that local government bodies were in communication to ensure that no one appears on more than one voter list.

Those responsible for the voter list at the local level are the mayor and the secretary of the respective council. Publicly posted lists were not always legible so that voters were not ensured of their right to view the voter list. Some of the lists were written by hand, and in some cases they were sun-bleached. Yet observers were informed that in some instances, including in Tirana, local officials failed or refused to rectify such problems.

The accuracy and public display of the voter register is a crucial aspect of any election system, and it is therefore of great importance that problems related to the processing and posting of the register are corrected in the future.

II.vii Voter Education

Voter education consisted of a limited TV campaign organised by the government and a poster campaign urging people to vote organised by an Albanian NGO. The TV voter education consisted of a reading of the electoral law in a dry and legalistic manner. Some additional information about how to use the ballot papers was also broadcast. The Albanian NGO had a small scale poster campaign urging the people to cast their vote in the election.

The lack of any further voter education campaign was regrettable. No posters or information material were available inside or outside the polling station. The ballot paper was split into two parts, the left side for the single mandate seat and the right side for the proportional seats. This created some confusion among the voters, and led to a high number of invalid ballots. This also served to slow down the voting process on election day.

In the future it is necessary to explain in detail to the electorate how to use the ballot paper. The invalidation of ballots due to simple error in marking the ballot is unfortunate for the individuals concerned who waited in long lines to cast their ballots.

III. THE CAMPAIGN

OSCE Copenhagen Commitment 7.7 permits "political campaigning to be conducted in a fair and free atmosphere". However, observers following the campaign felt that the authorities did not uphold this commitment.

Opposition parties seemed to be consistently banned from holding outdoor meetings, particularly in large towns. In Tirana, opposition parties requested and were denied permission for a rally in the central Skanderbeg square, whereas the ruling party was permitted to hold its May 24 rally in the central square.

Official explanations ranged from the possibility that opposition parties would not have enough supporters at their rally to justify closing the main square, to the view that the Ruling Party rally was not political but a concert, or to the fact that it was not a political rally but a Presidential address.

III.i Display of Democratic Party Posters on Government Buildings

With very few exceptions only posters and banners from the ruling party were displayed publicly during the campaign. Even on government ministry buildings in central Tirana, the ruling Democratic Party were allowed to place their campaign posters. These posters remained on the building in the week leading up to the election and on election day. In addition, the Democratic Party hung a huge banner in the central Skanderbeg square which was left hanging on election day.

III.ii Police Intimidation at Opposition Rallies

In Rreshen and Lezhe, observers witnessed that space allotted to PS rallies were in both cases too small to hold all the party supporters. Police were heavily present at the gate of the venue, and their behaviour was not discrete. Buildings granted for opposition rallies were often too small for the number of people wishing to attend, which in turn was stated as a justification for a massive police presence to maintain order.

In some instances observers reported seeing cars carrying candidates and supporters of opposition parties intercepted on their way to campaign events. For example, on May 18 Socialist Party supporters and candidates were stopped by a police-checkpoint on the Shkoder road behind which some supporters from the ruling party had blocked the road with a lorry. They were stopped because a rally at the local stadium in Shkoder, for which the SP had been granted permission by police on May 6, had been cancelled by the authorities at the last minute without prior notification. The police didn't stop the supporters from the ruling party from blocking the road and did not remove the lorry.

A second incident was witnessed by observers one week prior to election day. Supporters of the ruling party blocked the road entering Vlore, preventing cars from going to a Socialist Party rally. The observers noted that the police stood to one side and did not intervene to clear the road. Upon questioning those blocking the road claimed that this was a spontaneous protest by the people of Vlore against the SP. The observers noted, however, that many of those present had prepared banners against the SP and many of the vehicles had Tirana license plates.

The intimidating presence of police at opposition rallies, combined with police failure to prevent DP supporters from blocking roads and thus preventing opposition supporters from attending rallies, added to the close identification of the government and its security apparatus with the ruling party. This was felt by observers to create an air of intimidation of opposition parties as well as undue influence on voters. It also compromises OSCE commitment 5.4 which calls for "a clear separation between the State and political parties; in particular, political parties will not be merged with the State."

III.iv Media

The Society for Democratic Culture, an Albanian non-partisan civic organisation, employed internationally accepted methodology for measuring television time and content during the campaign. The SDC concluded that TV coverage of the parties respected the election law in its allotment of time to the various parties. However the SDC also stated that the extensive

coverage afforded to the President and the government represented overwhelming de facto coverage and promotion of the Democratic Party. They also noted that the method of coverage of the DP was also likely to favour them. The SDC cited concern with the order that news reports were presented, and the tendency to allow representatives from the ruling party to read their own statements rather than using a journalist.

IV. THE ELECTION DAY

IV.i Opening of the Polling Stations

The observers followed the opening of the poll at 7:00. Observers noted that based on their experiences, polling station commissions had not been fully constituted even by the morning of the election and the commission had not met before election day. Despite these problems, polling stations generally opened on time.

At the opening of the polls, many observers reported a tense environment as party representatives on the commission seemed very insecure as to whether or not they would be permitted to assist in the election process or even to remain on the commission. In Tirana, a woman accredited as a party observer for the Agrarian Party informed observers that the Chairman of the Commission had told her she must leave. Also in Tirana, many polling stations were only supplied with three chairs. A party representative for the Democratic Alliance was arrested and detained for requesting a chair.

The sealing of the ballot box was also observed. A plastic material and a string together with the official stamp was used to seal the boxes. The plastic seal did not seem to be very secure, and observers noted that in some polling stations the seal seemed to have been tampered with and physically altered during the day. In Lezhe, observers noted several unsealed ballot boxes, and in Pogradec and Kukes there were observer reports that the ballot boxes were not properly sealed.

IV.ii Polling Station Commissions

According to the election law, multi-party commissions administer the voting in the polling stations. The polling station commission is composed of equals, representing a government appointed Chairman and Secretary, and one member representing each political party or electoral grouping that has candidates in the zone. Issues of contention are supposed to be resolved by a majority vote of the polling station commission. However, observers noted serious departures from the law in the manner that polling station commissions were functioning. They appeared multi-party commissions in name only, but not in substance. This is a clear violation of the election law.

An extra non party person is appointed by the Prefect if the total number in the commission is even, to serve as the tie breaking vote. There were consistent reports that this so-called independent person was appointed, and playing a key role in the administration of the election, regardless of whether or not the commission had an even or odd number.

The lack of information and training provided to the polling station commission caused problems during the poll. Only the Chairman and the Secretary received instruction by the election authorities, which of course gave them an additional authority over the party representatives on the commissions.

Moreover, observers noted in several polling stations that it was impossible to speak with party representatives in the commission. The chairman in the polling station explained to the observers that they were not allowed to talk with the party representatives. No reason for the refusal was given. In other instances, party representatives couldn't give a proper answer when asked which party they represented.

IV.iii Layout of Polling Stations

Nearly all polling station visited by observers were not set up according to the law. Observers noted a consistent pattern whereby the government appointed members played the key role in processing voters and administering the election. The party representatives were in most instances given no role in the process and they were physically seated at a distance from the table where voters were processed. Greater confidence could have been instilled in the process if those administering the election had been seated in the middle of the room, in full view of party representatives and observers.

Many of the polling station visited were too small and not properly arranged. In some cases the polling booth was placed in a way that it was possible to look into it. In most polling station there was only one polling booth which led to long queues both inside and outside the polling station. In the future the polling stations with many voters must be rearranged to facilitate and speed up the voting process.

The ballot design, whereby voters mark a line through all deselected candidates and parties on the list, leaving only the selected candidate or party unmarked, is a cumbersome and time consuming process which contributed to the long queues.

IV.iv Lack of Official Protocols

A major issue of contention as the polling stations opened was the fact that the election authorities had failed to supply each polling station with the necessary number of final result sheets (protocols), permitting each polling station commissioner to have an official copy of the results. The fact that these documents had been supplied in grossly insufficient numbers contributed to undermine confidence in the process among the political parties.

While the election authorities could not explain why so few protocols had been delivered to the polling stations, in clear violation to the law, they did claim that photocopies of the protocols had been found in the possession of opposition supporters. Opposition parties claimed they had photocopied the official result sheet to ensure that their representatives would have a copy.

In order to protect the integrity of the system from this supposed threat, a representative of the Central Election Commission went on television at mid-day to announce a massive logistical effort of resupplying each polling station in the country with protocols printed in a different colour. Observers failed to see how the photocopied protocols could have been used to jeopardize the integrity of the system by creating incorrect and false results. Despite the issuance of new protocols they were still delivered in insufficient numbers and not to all polling stations. Observers noted that some polling commissions were uninformed about the issuance of the new protocols.

IV.v Maintenance of the Voter Register

The accuracy and proper keeping of the voter register did not seem to meet the standards prescribed by the law. In many cases the number of ballots cast exceeded the number of signatures on the voter register. During the count, observers noted the changing of the registers to bring into line with the number of ballots in the ballot box.

Observers reported that in some polling stations the reconciliation process, comparing the number of voters on the register to the number of ballots in the ballot box, never took place. The reconciliation process is the first crucial step in the counting process and serves as the basis for the entire vote count.

Observers noted that some Polling Station Commissions claimed that the voter turnout was far higher than indicated by the number of signatures on the voter register. In the Peshkopi area a team noted at about 4 pm that polling station commissioners were claiming that all voters had voted despite the fact that the register contained virtually no signatures.

IV.vi Proxy Voting

Several teams reported people voting with several ballot papers and in many cases family voting was a rule and not an exception. Family voting can to some extent be understood in countries with short voting traditions. It could under no circumstances be accepted when polling officials issue several ballot papers to one single voter, as observed frequently on election day.

IV.vii Security Personnel

Many observers reported a large police presence, both inside and outside polling stations. This was particularly noted in Berat and Lushnje, where police appeared to be playing an active role in the running of polling stations. In some cases the police even took part in the counting process.

At a number of polling stations, including Tirana, Berat and Kukes, observers saw unidentified persons and armed civilians. They were often playing an active role in the process, and locals identified them as secret police. In Kukove, the chief of the Prison Service was touring polling stations on election day.

In Korçe and Berat, police followed observers. In Tirana, an unidentified person in civilian clothes blocked observers from entering a polling station.

IV.viii Extended Hours of Voting

The opening hours were extended from 8:00pm to 10:00pm by a Presidential decree on polling day. The message was communicated to most polling stations during the day but some of the stations didn't receive the message. The extension of the opening hours had no general impact on the outcome of the election, but it is not good for the credibility of the election process to change the conditions on election day.

V. THE VOTE COUNT

The general impression of most observers is that the counting process was not carried out in an orderly and secure manner, or according to the election law. In some instances observers noted manipulation of the results. Decisions were made in an arbitrary manner by the government appointed Chairman.

In many instances polling commission officials did not appear to understand the regulations for the counting procedure. Observers reported that contrary to the law, the entire ballot was often invalidated even if just one half of the ballot was filled incorrectly. Also, many polling station commissions had disagreements over what constituted an invalid ballot.

There were consistent reports from observers that invalid ballots were not properly identified in a uniform manner, or appropriately segregated. There were also widespread reports of the alteration of ballots cast for opposition parties to make them invalid. The huge number of invalid ballots registered in this election process is not satisfactory. In most cases the majority of the invalid ballots were cast for one of the opposition parties.

Examples of irregularities in the counting process include:

In Berat an observer team noted that the turnout in one polling station was 105%. In another polling station there were too few signatures in the voter register compared with the number of ballots in the ballot box. Extra signatures were added to the voter register in the presence of observers. In Berat an observers team was advised to leave the polling station during the vote count.

In Lushnje a polling station closed at noon. In another polling station, 942 ballot papers were in the ballot box, but there were only 880 signatures on the voter register.

In Fier, one polling station closed at 7:00pm reporting a 100% turnout, but observers reported voters still turning up only to be turned away. In another polling station, the same scenario was reported at 8:00pm.

In one polling station in Gjirokaster it was observed that the votes for one major opposition party were counted for the ruling party. In another polling station in Gjirokaster, Socialist

Party voters were included for the Democratic Party, giving the DP a majority. After checking by observers it was noted that while the official count for the SP was 157 votes out of 404 valid, observers counted 170 SP votes just checking half the pile.

In Kukes, an observer who understands Albanian overheard the chairman of a polling station phoning somebody to apologise for not being able to 'deliver the required result' due to the presence of international observers. Other observers noted that ballot boxes were not properly sealed and there were security police inside the polling station.

In Kucove an observer team noted the presence of pre-filled ballot papers as well as the bunching of votes in the ballot box when the box was emptied for the counting process. It was noted that these voters were all for the ruling party. Also in Kucove an interpreter was advised by police not to interpret anything for the observers during the vote count.

In Korce, an observer team noted 90 invalid ballots during the count. Forty five were for the Socialist Party and forty five were for other opposition parties. No invalid ballots had been recorded for the ruling Democratic Party.

In Pogradec observers noted the clear invalidation of opposition party ballots with some 30% of the total number of votes being deemed invalid. It was also consistently noted that opposition party votes were placed with invalid votes. Also in Pogradec, marks on the ballot papers causing them to be invalidated were marked in a different colour ink than appropriate marks on the rest of the ballot.

In Tirana, it was noted that the polling commissions did not clearly understand regulations pertaining to invalid ballots. In one instance the polling commission was invalidating entire ballots in cases where only half the ballot was actually invalid. In another instance, there was no separation of valid and invalid ballot papers during the count. The number of invalid ballot papers were recorded only after observers requested to know the number of invalid ballots. Polling officials registered 8 invalid ballots in this particular polling station, whereas observers counted 80.

THE SECOND ROUND

The second round of the Albanian Parliamentary elections took place on Sunday, June 2nd. Second round balloting occurred in nine zones where a candidate failed to receive more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round. The two candidates with the highest number of votes from the first round balloting proceed to the second round.

Based on a limited assessment of the second round, the overall conduct of the election was greatly improved when compared to the first round. The observers noted that voter identification was checked and cross referenced with the voter register, voter identifications were stamped after the voter had signed off the list, and that voters were able to cast a secret ballot in an orderly environment. Certain minor irregularities were reported.

Observers present for the second round noted that it was important to assess the second round of the election in the overall context of the whole election process, and therefore considered that the second round took place in an already compromised election process.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made by observers, and include:

- Establishment of a permanent and independent Central Election Commission to create confidence in the administration of the election process among all parties and the electorate;
- Establishment of a more realistic timetable in the election law for election related deadlines. The present time schedule in the existing law is too tight;
- Establishment of a comprehensive voter education program, particularly in light of the large number of invalid ballots;
- Re-designing the ballot papers so that the voter only selects the party or candidate of his/her choice by marking only the party/candidate selected, eliminating the time consuming process of having to draw a line through each party/candidate deselected;
- Establishment of a more inclusive process for amending the electoral map, so that all parties can have greater confidence in this process. The CEC should also be involved in any future amendments to the electoral map, which is not possible under the existing law due to the fact that the Commission is appointed only 45 days prior to election day. The appointment of a permanent Commission would address this problem ;
- Implementation of confidence building measures, such as full co-operation with international observers, accreditation of all domestic observers, the issuance of protocols to polling stations in sufficient numbers and mandatory sealing of ballot boxes;
- Updating the accuracy of the voter register, and improved accessibility of the electorate to the voter register;
- Establishment of a standardized training of all election officials (including party representatives) at all levels of the election administration;
- Placing of more than one polling booth per polling station;
- The responsibilities of police should be more clearly defined with regard to the election process.