

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S INTERVIEW ON *TONIGHT ILVA TARE*

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Ilva Tare: Good evening! Good evening ladies and gentlemen! I have a special interview tonight. We have in our studio tonight the Head of Presence of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ambassador Eugen Wollfarth. Good evening! Welcome!

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Good evening, Ilva! It is good to be here at Ora News.

Ilva Tare: It is a pleasure to have you in such a tense situation. We are only thirteen days before the elections, the campaign has reached its peak. How do you find it? How are you experiencing the election process so far in the quality of Head of the OSCE Presence?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “This is a decisive year for Albania and elections are a prime event in democracy. Personally, I am very happy to see that the programmes of the parties are mentioned in this campaign and are part of it. So, the content is there – that is very important and this I find really laudable.”

Ilva Tare: Interesting! It is true that there has been a competition of programmes, and there has also been even some spectacle in the way such programs are presented, according to the comments of some analysts. Is such spectacle good, or is it harmful? What do you think?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It is important to make the citizens more interested in the content and in the programmes and a little spectacle, of course, can be part of it. But, in the end, it should be about the content, how to form the future of Albania in the best possible form and also be convincing to the citizens.”

Ilva Tare: Unfortunately, apart from such elements of spectacle, conversations – which the Prime Minister refers to as ‘townhalls’, and the opposition leader as ‘communication corners’ – with the citizens, there have also been some incidents in these elections. First, some removal of flags or posters, and a case of violence was reported yesterday by one of the New Democratic Spirit candidates in Fier. Are you concerned about potential episodes of violence during this campaign?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes, as you say potential violence, especially when it then happens, not only as a potential, but when it is really happening, this is not what politics should be about. It should be a peaceful campaign. Also, citizens should behave and abstain from any act of violence. It should be a discussion time and exchanging and competing with good ideas. So, attacking offices or, even worse, attacking politicians or candidates is certainly not the right way and I would not consider it democratic. It is putting a burden on any campaign.”

Ilva Tare: So, would you consider these elections as not being conducted in a democratic manner, given the fact that we have some violent incidents?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “No. I wouldn’t say that. The overwhelming part of the citizens are very peaceful and this is what counts. Occasional incidents do not change that, but of course all together have to make clear that there is no desire for violence, quite the contrary: peace is necessary for sound and good and also democratic development and these times should be dedicated to peace. There is no reason to attack anybody violently.”

Ilva Tare: Do you expect any escalation of the potential incidents, or do you think that the situation will get calmer with the approaching of June 23rd, the day of elections?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “No. Nothing is impossible, but I don’t expect it. I know and I learned to know that the Albanians are a peaceful people and I do not see any reason to believe that there would be changes. The Albanians are building their country. That includes all camps and they prefer peace to war. Why should they change this habit? It is a good habit to prefer peace and avoid crime.”

Ilva Tare: Does the tense climate show that the election results can be somehow tight? One side is looking for more mandates, while the other wants to come to power. So, does this polarization and this probability of a tight result lead to tension and conflicts in the field?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It is probably not the narrowness of the possible result. It is a little bit the custom in talking aloud and talking about all sorts of scenarios. What is very difficult, of course, in democracy, is that in the end, the country must win. This is connected with the conduct of the candidates and the camps included. So, one camp will win in the end and the other camp will lose. It is for the voters to decide who they want. It is for the election administration to give a right picture of what the voters want on Election Day and it is also – and this is the hardest part – for the one that gets less votes, accepting that the other one won. Losing, of course, is a much harder part than winning. That is what makes the difference in democracy: accepting also the loss and working hard for the next time, for the next electoral campaign and the next Election Day to win then, hopefully with more convincing arguments.”

Ilva Tare: I will certainly also ask you later in the interview how political parties in Albania behave and whether the rules of the game should preferably be clear from the start, and not change on the way, or even worse, when the electoral process is over. But let us elaborate on the current situation a little further, analysing somehow the latest electoral reform done by the political parties in Albania, Ambassador Wollfarth. Do you think that as a result of this reform, we have full guarantees for a free and fair electoral process?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It provides a better legal platform than before the reform, but in the end it is a recipe that needs to be followed to come to a good result. It does not replace the players, and there are many in an election campaign. It is not only the Central Election Commission. They are only one of the tools. The main players are the people and the parties. These, all together, have to make elections happen in a peaceful, in a respectful and, therefore, also in a successful way. It takes a lot of political will sticking to the rules, applying them; also, not only respecting the rules, but also respecting the opposite side; using the right vocabulary; being hard in content, but with good conduct in choosing what vocabulary is being used and trying hard to be convincing with the programme and also with the arguments when representing

a camp, presenting the better offer for the future, which includes democratic development, which includes peaceful development, which includes prosperity, so economic development, education, and all these issues that are so important to lead to way to a better future. The parties can do it. The camps can do it. It is about team play inside the camps and, in the very special case of Albania, also after elections to play as a team for Albania when it comes to the reform process for European integration. So, it is a complex issue.”

Ilva Tare: It is complex indeed. I agree with you, Ambassador Wollfarth, but I would like to focus a little more on that. You rightfully said that there are some important players in an electoral process: that includes the citizens, but I believe that their task ends on 23 June, once they vote. Later, it is the political parties which take over. Considering the current situation of trust, or mistrust rather, how many guarantees are there for these elections?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “There are more players than I mentioned earlier. One important player I have not mentioned yet are also the media, being the eyes, the ears and, through comments also, the tongue of the citizens in carefully watching and conveying what is happening in the Central Election Commission’s sessions. Before it was in the parliament, now it is following the campaigns, the candidates in their municipalities, when they are reaching out to the citizens, when they are talking and also – that is expected, I have seen it also in 2011 throughout the local elections – in being present when the counting takes place, and also when the counting is finished and the process afterwards continues, when there are by-elections, when there are all these steps that make up the complete set of elections.”

Ilva Tare: We certainly cover the whole electoral package, and this time given the climate of trust we have and because of the electoral reform and the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, there was a need for more guarantees in these elections. One of the projects was the electronic counting in Fier. Why did this project fail, Ambassador? Who is responsible for this?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “That certainly needs more analysis, but the... you were asking about the electronic counting in Fier. One technical limitation, if I understand that right, was there from the beginning, that only a certain number of electoral subjects were technically possible with what was described when the tender was held. So, there is a technical limitation. Now, something prevailed – which should prevail in democracy – this is not excluding anybody that wants to run as an electoral subject. No party or no individual can do that and therefore the result was that it was far beyond the limit of 42. In most of the ballots it is 66, if I understand that right, and in some cases even 67. So, that would not allow for a technically correct electronic counting and therefore the safest option is to return to a hand count and that, what I understand, is what is in mind. So, this is something which is certainly not dramatic. That is why it is good to have pilot projects and also see and sound out the way forward to maybe have it in next elections. That may be also through different machineries or through a different system in having bigger conglomerates of parties together, so that you do not have to select from so many. So, it is certainly something to learn from, but I would not see any reason to see something alarming in that. This is a learning process, and the most important thing is to have the confidence and the co-operation in having sound elections, sticking to the rules throughout the country and, of course, including Fier.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador Wollfarth, I am sure that you remember the counting scenes for days and hours in mini-municipality 5 of Tirana, and this was exactly why this project was developed, i.e. to prove that we have grown in our democratic behaviour, in our technological one as well, considering especially that technological development is one of the achievements mentioned by the Government. Wouldn't it be better if all these elements were taken into consideration in advance, so that we would not fail with the very first project we develop for reaching a higher standard in the electoral process in Albania?

Ambassador Wollfarth: "Now we are just a couple of days away from the election. I was among those that would have wished for earlier solutions, but it is what it is. So, the best thing is to do a honest counting, the parties participate in that, and it is no drama when a pilot project is not going as fantastic as hoped for."

Ilva Tare: Of course.

Ambassador Wollfarth: "And then it can be done better the next time. The important thing is that the overall counting is correct, that the overall process is correct, and there we have large international involvement. Let me just hint again that the OSCE is present also with the ODIHR Election Observation Mission. They are already on the ground. They will be joined by more short-term observers so they look at all these elements. Other important organizations join the OSCE in this effort. The Council of Europe will be present – they are also right now here in the country with a very important delegation. So, it is also team work from the internationals' side to help all the Albanian players to come to really good elections. But the core issue, the most important part comes from the Albanians themselves. It is Albania; it is in the hands of Albanians; and all what the internationals are doing is in support of Albanians living their democracy the best possible way, and every time it is getting better. By the way, nobody is perfect, so nobody expects perfection here, but it must be up to an acceptable level in precision, in honesty, and hopefully also with trust, confidence coming from the citizens. This is only achievable through joint work."

Ilva Tare: You rightfully said that honest counting is what all the Albanian people want, and the biggest question these days is whether we will manage to have that. I will however, ask you about that again later. You said that elections should at least reach an acceptable level, as nobody is perfect. But what is the limit? How many mistakes shall be tolerated? To what extent shall irregularities not be considered fatal for the destiny of elections? What is the limit this time, or shall elegant words be used again to avoid the true problems of elections, if there will be any, although this was the case in the past?

Ambassador Wollfarth: "I do not have a secret mathematic formula to say so and so many digits behind the dot are legitimate. It should be as close to zero mistakes as humanly possible, and it has been very close to that margin in the past. So, I do not see a problem for the future provided that at the counting tables all that are present, also for their parties, do an honest job. I do not see any reason why they shouldn't be able to perform that. They will perform that in a team. A counting table is usually with four that do the initial unpacking – if there are questions afterwards, they are joined by others. It is controlled with many eyes, on top also with cameras."

In the room additional observers, also citizens included, are allowed, so all the elements should be there for precision.”

Ilda Tare: To be precise, of course! I shall ask you, for instance, will this be a problem for the elections, but this question will be for the next part of the interview, for I want to close this first part with a question for another project, also a problematic one, maybe the word failure is not the right word, but the electronic counting and identification in Tirana does not seem to have functioned. Only 44 voters could be identified through the ID cards in Tirana in more than four hours. Now it is up to the CEC to take a decision on whether electronic identification will be used. Again, was it a mistake not properly calculated? How can it be explained that it failed again and why does Albania leave, generally, important preparations for the elections to the last minute when it is too late to do the necessary tests?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I understand that the test is planned and coming. At this stage, I can tell you, and this is not to be evasive: I did not come as a prosecutor and I did not come as a judge. We are looking to give advice in time and I can highlight that we were very happy that the Electoral Code reform took place last year, so well before the elections. Where we had a direct influence, we did what we could, together also with ODIHR experts to provide good advice for a sound Electoral Code reform. Many of the recommendations – not absolutely all – but many of the recommendations and certainly all key recommendations were respected in the Electoral Code reform. It was also extremely important to see that the electronic testing was limited to pilot projects, and not introducing something which was conveyed as an idea throughout the country. That would have been a major challenge even for any country producing computers and having the best IT in the world. This is always something that you do step by step. So, all that was there. What I see is that the CEC was nominated relatively late given the huge task, and we also see these days an incomplete CEC. That of course is also putting a burden on normal functioning, normal work, because also that work is easier when you do it in a team of seven than when you do it in a team of four.”

Ilda Tare: You helped me, for when we return after the commercial breaks, we will speak about the Central Election Commission, the way it is operating. Finally, you said that the internationals, the partners, and the OSCE mission are present in Albania to support the Albanian institutions. In fact, Albanians, politics have often seen internationals as referees and maybe have expected that you, Ambassador, be more direct, clearer, to tell somehow where the Albanian parties are making mistakes and why they making are mistakes. Why haven't you played this role, at least lately? The international community seems to have chosen an ambiguous, unclear, not direct voice.

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I would like you to allow me to say something else. I think I did and I think others did as well. But Albania is a sovereign country and sovereignty, when combined with liberty, also includes that you can have it your own way. Advice is not an order, but I think it was made clear from the OSCE Presence and also from other very important friends of Albania that a complete CEC, based on trust and on the law, is what we would like to see and what should be established. We are where we are – we see only four members working.”

Ilva Tare: So that it is clear to me, maybe: when a sovereign state conducts anti-democratic actions, you just observe, advise or do you also react?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “We give the hint what is preferable. One has also the liberty to be not perfect, but to wilfully avoid to perform also has a price. The speed of integration might be affected. This is certainly something the citizens might pay for with speed of development of democratic institutions, of the judicial system, because all that is also connected with the economy.”

Ilva Tare: It seems to me that, more or less, you gave a warning as to what awaits us if the 23rd of June is not free, fair and accepted by all parties.

Ambassador Wollfarth: “This is, again, something very similar to what we discussed earlier: accepting when having lost; this is the harder part and the country certainly should not suffer again by a political blockade. The Constitution foresees that for important reform legislation a 60 per cent majority is needed, and none of the camps, as things stand, is very likely to get this 60 per cent. Therefore, after the Election Day, also Team Albania is needed and Team Albania, in my eyes, is when it comes to the reform process, discussing together and also deciding together. Discussing together and not deciding together is not enough. One must come to a decision to make headway in the European integration and in the reform process. Stagnation or even going backwards would certainly not be enough. Therefore, I am among those being very happy that these three items, some say the three EU laws, were adopted just before, or already in the summer break and therefore help to open the way after elections, for whoever is leading the next government.”

Ilva Tare: The fact that no coalition has a 60% majority, which is in fact needed for the majority in the parliament, is it your perception or do you have your surveys to base it on?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “There were some interesting polls. The polls also have their margin of error, but it looks like a quite tight race. I would not be in a position to predict who wins. What I would like to see winning in the end is Albania, through applied democracy, good elections and the willingness to play as a team for a reform process, a reform agenda where all participate in the parliament, from opposition and from government, with good ideas, contributing and helping the country to speed up the development process. This is what is needed. It is needed for jobs, it is needed for social peace. This is also what Albanians merit. I like this place. I like Albania and I like these three years of work, and I have liked very much to see the progress, but, believe me, I would have liked to see even more of it.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador, this is one of your last interviews before leaving. I will ask you about your impressions of Albania, how you worked and also cooperated with politicians, but the last question before we really go to a commercial break: In team Albania, which you mentioned, do you see a possible cooperation after elections between Berisha and Rama? Are you talking about a broad coalition that would enable, at least with regards to reforms, advancement towards integration?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I sure hope so. Leaving aside names, anybody in any major party has, in my eyes, the duty to be patriotic in the sense of serving the country. Blocking at all costs is certainly not the right way, as is moving ahead without discussion. That is not the right way either. There needs to be sound discussion, there needs to be inclusion of the political camps for the decision-making when it comes to the 60 per cent laws. It is not only legitimate. This is also very important in democracy. There can and also should be differences between the camps in discussing, in competing with good ideas and also to show where the difference is. This way, the citizens get to know the parties much better and know also whom to elect, whom to trust for the next term. This is very important and this, at least for me, is what democracy is about. It is a bet on the future – from whom you expect that portion of leadership that makes a country a better country, a better place to live.”

Ilva Tare: Of course. After the commercial break I shall ask the OSCE Ambassador in Albania, Mr. Wollfarth, on the way the OSCE Mission reacted with regards to the independence of the CEC and the dismissal of commissioner Muho. I will be back in a few minutes.

Ilva Tare: Dear viewers, we are live in this interview on “Tonight Ilva Tare” with the OSCE Ambassador in Albania, Eugen Wollfarth. Ambassador, we shall enter into the most neuralgic point of these elections, in the CEC, which is in total impasse currently, with four members. There seem to be reactions and signs from the opposition and it is now a fact that there will be no replacement of the three vacancies. The majority, too, regardless of the fact that they have called on the opposition to fill the vacant positions, seems to have no more negotiations in order to have a more complete CEC on the 23rd of June. To what extent does this fact affect the progress of the electoral process, the fact that it functions with four members alone?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “This is certainly a deplorable situation. We have pointed at the need that it would be clearly desirable and also helping the trust of the citizens to have a seven-member CEC according to the Electoral Code. This is the most important issue. The Electoral Code, which Albania has given itself, should be observed and it is heavily depending on the political will of all that have to contribute. In the case of the Central Election Commission that is including and starting with the political parties that have the right and also the obligation to nominate candidates for the CEC, which are then, afterwards, to be confirmed by the parliament. If this is not done, then there is also a shortcoming in behaviour of the respective parties that don’t do so. In this case here, there were some preceding events that led to a new composition on the government side. That was also a disputable act. The discussion of that is not completely finished and, in part, that non-nomination of candidates is explained by that. But this should not and cannot be the end of this story, because operating with four is good for technical decisions – it is legally enough, but it is certainly not enough for the qualified majority decisions that are needed once the result comes. There, these shortcomings might have the burdening effect on the elections and the electoral process. I remind that many observers are here in the country, starting with the ODIHR – they observe that closely and one does not have to be a sort of a magician to foresee that this will be part of any report describing these electoral proceedings and the process.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador, you said that the dismissal of one of the members of the CEC is disputable. What does this mean, for there are two alternatives legally speaking: it is either legal or illegal? What does disputable mean?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Disputable means you would have to present it to a judge so that he can decide and there are legal arguments describing that case that could convince a judge in either direction. But, as I said earlier, I did not come tonight as a prosecutor, nor did I come as a judge. So, I would leave that to the Albanian side. It is an Albanian law and the Albanians also must be able to find that decision within their legal and judicial framework. So, if needed – but nobody really should need that invitation – I would invite to make good use of the legal system of this country, and also observe closely how it is being used, because that is leading to another hot spot, which is the rule of law: what can you expect as a citizen? You have laws, very often very good laws, but how does that affect your life, in real life, when you need the laws? Is it true that your right is guaranteed? Do you really get it? Or is it just on paper? This is clearly one of these cases where the test could be done.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador Wollfarth, I share the same opinion as you that you are not here in the quality of the prosecutor or judge, but you certainly are here to help, contribute, support Albania and its institutions in preserving their independence. This is what I want to ask you about. Some of your critics say that the way you reacted, your stances with regards to the dismissal of the member of the CEC were unclear and confusing. Concretely, they refer to your reaction before the dismissal from the Parliament, as well as after it. I have extracted two brief reactions as to how you reacted during those days, the days of dismissal and I would like to comment on them together.

[From video]

Wollfarth: So now I understand clarification is on-going on which legal basis any further decision could and would be taken and so more time apparently is passing by and this subject might be taken up on Monday by the Assembly again. So we have to observe developments. [...]

Wollfarth: Albania has fortunately larger resources of good people being able to professionally work in the Central Election Commission and also in the CEAZs, but it is very important to do the utmost and especially from the host country side to keep politics as far as possible out of bodies like the Central Election Commission. It should be seen as an apolitical, technical body.

Ilva Tare: Two stances that different analysts have called confusing, different from the statement of the Ambassador of the United States of America, Alexander Arvizu, for example, which was very sharp with regards to the preservation of an apolitical CEC. Does the accusation that you were confused and unclear stand and maybe with a stronger intervention of yours the dismissal of Mr. Muho from the CEC would have prevented this impasse we are in today?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “If I look carefully, one was on 12 April, before the decision in the parliament on 15 April and the other one was afterwards, when the 48 hours – which are foreseen in the Electoral Code to nominate candidates – were still going on. So, the opposition parties, in

this case, could have reacted. On the 12th, I was giving for the... the politicians should have understood if they wanted to react.... That was in a time when the discussion was still going on whether to stick to a ten-year-old agreement to have a government-led CEC and a strong contribution from the opposition in the seven-member CEC. When you know that, as an informed player – and the party politicians should be counted among those, and also the ones that want to give comments, including the journalists – they have clearly understood. What came as a surprise was on that Monday that the removal of one of the members of the CEC, of Mr. Muho, was based on an old decree from former President Moisiu at that time, and not based on the balance of the CEC anymore. This is quite interesting, because it refers to something that should have known before, when Mr. Muho was elected in the first place. So, enough time for Albanian actors to act, which they did not do, at least not in a fully satisfactory manner, but that is already observed and I am still in the same state of agreement and disagreement as before. This is not what the country deserves. This is an incomplete situation. Now it is just a couple of days, less than two weeks, thirteen days to election – it is never too late, but it is quite late and a lot of time has already been lost. So, to repair that, to come to senses, would be certainly a favour to the voters in this country and respect to the citizens. So, I hope for that, but this is a friendly appeal and the liberty to act lies, in this case, with the parties.”

Ilva Tare: Did you express to the current ruling majority, to Prime Minister Berisha, your concern that the Central Electoral Commission would be affected by the dismissal of the former member of the CEC, Mr. Muho, which you said was done based on a previous decree by the then President of the Republic, and what was the Prime Minister’s reply?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “There were talks with the government side and this message was certainly arriving.”

Ilva Tare: What was the answer?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It is not important what was said to me. You can observe the facts how they were presented in the parliament.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador, it seems that even the preliminary report of OSCE/ODIHR mentioned that some decisions taken by the Central Election Commission with four votes should have been taken with five votes. Just by citing this fragment of the report, do you think the electoral process has been compromised already at this stage, even before the Election Day?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Allow me to just underline what ODIHR said and this would be a conclusion for after the elections, so I’d be cautious at this moment. We have the Election Observation Mission in the country. We want altogether, the OSCE Presence here on the ground, all the observers, we want to see progress based on the rule of law here, so let’s go step by step.”

Ilva Tare: I agree, let’s take them step by step, but we should certainly refer to the memory and previous experience as well. Are you of the opinion that the trust of the Albanian voters for exercising their democratic civic right of voting on June 23rd will be increased in a situation where, as happened on May 8 in the Tirana municipality, the final result will be announced by

the Electoral College? Is this a good guarantee for the elections? Does it motivate citizens to trust the election institution?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It should not shy them off from voting. I would invite to participate in democracy. Voting is certainly one core action, and one of the prime civil rights of any citizen, so it should be used, but, at the same time, this should not be the end of the story. Being active in civil society, being an active citizen to enter into dialogue with politicians, with the parties, or participate in a party, I would find very important and helpful. Albania still is a young democracy and that kind of communication can help to find more common ground and that common ground is needed. Let me return to the picture of Team Albania, when 60 per cent are needed, when the reform agenda has to be moved forward for more jobs and for better rule of law. This can only be done if all parts and larger parts of the population are backing it, and this is not happening when political parties block each other. This is something which clearly should not be repeated.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador, what could be the real risk or problems Albania might face if the final result of the election is certified by the Electoral College and not accepted by the losing party? What does this mean for the country according to your opinion?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “For the time being, this is a hypothetical question. I trust that the teams at the counting tables will not cheat. I liked very much what I saw through... Let me just one minute deviate to something which I consider very important: this country is a happy country because it is more than 100 years old in its modern statehood. This did not happen to all peoples on the planet and with these 100 years there was also, for good reason, a lot of pride present. That should be used for something constructive. Albania has decided itself to be a democracy, to integrate into European structures, so all energy should be used for that. In elections we expect to see that pride also from the loser, even so that is the harder part to accept that not all can win. The only one that can win is the Albanian people, but not all politicians, not all parties at the same time. This is not possible, because this you only have in cases when you have only one party and this is clearly not the case here. Here it is at least 62 parties, I understand, 66 even, and maybe there are even more parties we don't even know of because they forgot to register. So, there are clearly options, some of them very viable and why should they not work together? Why should they block? Why should one of those groups not accept that they did not gain the majority this time and still can be an important part? Because this is something which has a certain beauty: Albania forces itself by the legal situation it has requiring this 60 per cent. The team play is required and Albanians have to play together and not against each other. We need to see team play and not fighting, not a civil conflict situation.”

Ilva Tare: Maybe the losing party in Albania does not yet have the culture, tradition of accepting loss because, even according to the OSCE/ODIHR standards, Albania has not yet had fully accepted, democratic, free and fair elections, despite the help, assistance and advice you have provided all these years.

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It is still a young democracy, but, believe me, when I saw reactions also in other countries: it is tough when you realize after what you consider a convincing campaign that you did not get the majority of the votes. This, of course, is a bitter moment, but

some politicians grow in these moments and then the next time they win and have learned from that experience. It is part of democracy, but it is bitter, it is bitter.”

Ilva Tare: And it should actually be bitter and it has provoked the audience because I am receiving many text messages from the viewers. I would like to share one of them with you because it relates to the conversation we are having. One of the viewers asks: why do you say the loser should accept the loss instead of telling Berisha directly to hold fair elections?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Well, this is the legal obligation of the government. He knows that already, to start with the second part. And losing elections... when I mean accepting losing elections, I am talking about democratic elections, and I am talking about fair and free elections. And for seeing how fair and how free that is, we have to wait and see what the OSCE/ODIHR and the other observation missions jointly come up with, because we also have parliamentarians in the country. But when it comes to the results, this is from any democrat, from any part of the spectrum, from any part of political background it is expected that the choice of the voters is accepted at the end of the day.”

Ilva Tare: Based on the current climate, the manner of conducting the campaign and the way preparations for the elections are being done, do you think Albania is ready to have a rotation through a free and fair process or is there too much pressure from the current government - which is, somehow, responsible for the election – to use everything in terms of the state machinery, to hamper this rotation?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Albania has already seen rotations several times, so it is already ready for a long time for accepting what voters want on Election Day. So I do not see a contradiction in that, and I do not see, in this respect, any exceptional situation this year. It is on 23 June when the voters can decide and should decide. It should be counted. There should be free access to the voting centres and there should be a transparent counting procedure, and then there should be acceptance of that fair and clear and transparently counted voting result. That’s it.”

Ilva Tare: Is the OSCE Presence concerned about the reports, coming not only from the Opposition but also from various reports of the observers, on the use of the public administration for electoral purposes or on the political dismissals?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Now we are in the time when the observation missions are on the ground. You described, indeed, the legal situation which should be observed at the national and also at the local levels. Because there can also be abuses at different levels and all that is being observed. The law is quite clear in that, that there needs to be a clear separation between a party activity and an activity when acting in a public office.”

Ilva Tare: So, you will not share your judgment now, but will wait for the final OSCE/ODIHR report?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “That is very correct, Ilva.”

Ilva Tare: Another commercial break and we will be back with the third part of the interview with the OSCE Ambassador in Tirana, Mr. Eugen Wollfarth, in a few moments.

Ilva Tare: We are back with the live interview. Mr. Ambassador, I have many questions and only a few minutes left, because in addition to the elections I would like to ask you about your experience during your three year mission in Albania, which is coming to an end. We have already received the invitation for your farewell ceremony on 27 June, but I will ask you a bit later for that. To go back once more to the Central Election Commission: one of the remarks mentioned also in the preliminary report of the OSCE/ODIHR was the fact that political parties change the CEAZ commissioners immediately after being trained. Can this be accepted – having CEAZ members not trained before the Election Day?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Through appealing, of course you can perform better when you know your task, and this is better after training. When new people arrive after training has been provided, this is certainly a challenge, but to see that limited would be very important.”

Ilva Tare: During the electoral campaign there has been news, reports, assumptions, facts – although not yet publicly proven – rumours of selling and buying votes. Have you heard about these? Is the OSCE concerned?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “If activities like that are reported, there is, of course, some attention attracted to that and also some analysis is taking place. Unfortunately, I heard already from earlier elections of similar patterns. Some of the cases seemed in the past to be true, others not. So, it is worth some investigation. It is certainly not comforting news and it should be avoided because it is illegal.”

Ilva Tare: What about these elections, have there been reports or cases you are examining?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Let me point at some newspaper reports which I saw. There it was mentioned, indeed.”

Ilva Tare: Ok. To go back again to the Central Election Commission and to the work of the four members, there is concern from one party – even in reports – about the fact that a public information campaign on how voters should vote has not started yet. 23rd of June is close and there is no such active campaign in the media to instruct Albanians how to vote. Why these delays, be it technical delays, in this process?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “For what part are you thinking? That they have to make a cross and not write on the ballot sheet and things like that?”

Ilva Tare: How to vote. What to vote with, which documents. Those public information campaigns which start, I believe, one month in advance or even earlier and which we see even in Germany, but which we have not seen yet in Albania where even the voting culture is not the same, isn't it?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes. With all due respect, I do not expect to see all repeated which could serve as a good example elsewhere, but the voter education was done in the past. I have not heard reports that it was not done yet. It is like in past elections. If you want me to do that part: you bring your ID card, you come yourself and not with the ID card of your brother or your sister, register, get your ballot sheet, make one cross and don’t write on the ballot sheet and stick it into the box. When you vote in Tirana, in a certain *minibashkia*, you have the offer to cast more votes, because there are some by-elections, because some people are running for parliament and cannot stay as mayors anymore. I think having seen that conveyed already in the media, but perhaps some cannot follow that. There is still time and people like here to learn it just the day before.”

Ilva Tare: You did an excellent job presenting the way how we should vote, but I am convinced that there are relevant institutions, such as the CEC or others, which are involved in projects and which should have already started this awareness campaign, at least in the media, to the citizens, and also through different leaflets. However, I’ll stop here since I already got your answer in this regards. To conclude with the Central Election Commission: taking into account the political climate and the experiences we have had with the CEC, should you as the OSCE mission have insisted to have a nonpartisan Central Election Commission as in many other countries with a more consolidated democracy compared to Albania?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “There are several possibilities and when you have a balanced CEC you come very close to neutral as well. You had this clip earlier when I stressed that the CEC should be apolitical, because indeed it has to take technical decisions, mainly technical decisions in a political environment – elections are always political. And they can do it with absolutely neutral persons or with a balanced composition from several parties, but the decisive element is to perform, to decide based on the law and when working technically also doing that in technical performance, so with precision, timely, with the necessary transparency and nothing else.”

Ilva Tare: So, there is no problem with the model we chose? The problem lies in the way how we apply it?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “You are now talking of a CEC with seven members as it would be if there would be seven members, and they would be nominated three and three, plus, after a special selection process, the chair. Then the answer is yes.”

Ilva Tare: Yes, I got the answer for that case, which is “yes.” I was talking in a broader extent. When the reform was made, should you have exerted more pressure so that the Central Election Commission would have been completely nonpartisan, or don’t you think that this is a good model for Albania?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “That was not an item that was discussed in the last Electoral Code reform, because it was not disputed among parties, so the focus was on where there was a common interest to move forward, based on the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations from the former elections, including 2011 local elections and 2009 general elections.”

Ilva Tare: I'll conclude with the part on the CEC and elections since I want to talk a little bit about the role of the Mission during your mandate, the OSCE, and your experience. Allow me to be a bit more direct with questions now: Ambassador Wollfarth, how bad do the June 23 elections have to be in order to be considered bad and how good do they have to be in order to be considered good? I'll give you concrete examples. If, for instance, there is a problem with family voting, if there are commissioners who take the stamp and block the counting process, if there are cases of ballot paper snapshots made to show to the employer, if carousel voting is used, if counting is stopped for no reason, if, if, if... In that case, how would you consider the June 23 elections, good or bad?

Ambassador Wollfarth: "You mean if all mistakes are committed, how I would consider them? It would be a big surprise if I would say I would find that fantastic. None of that should happen, so I would like to repeat at this occasion: every voter should go with his or her decision, ID card, and take a clean ballot paper and make one cross, and that's it, and cast it. So, no cheating, no family voting, whatever, selling, buying votes. This is not a market. This should be a free decision by every individual who is on the voter list."

Ilva Tare: What if that happens, what would you say in the final report? Would you be evasive again? Would you say "it better had not happened but the elections are still acceptable," or would you say such things should not happen in a country with a solid democracy?

Ambassador Wollfarth: "It is not me or my team that will write that election report. It is the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission that will write that one. What we do from the OSCE Presence is, based on the findings, help to prepare for the next step, and the next step is the next elections. The next elections are scheduled on local level in 2015 and in 2017 the next general elections. Any state learns from experience. Therefore, it is clear that the next steps will come, but how they precisely need to be, that will be also defined through how this election process goes. So, I don't expect a large series of unhappy things on 23 June. I expect that most citizens, if not all, are interested in sticking to the rules. They want a truthful result. They want to have a good future, and I see the overwhelming majority of Albanians interested in democracy and in peace. I do not see a reason why they should not get it."

Ilva Tare: All right. That was a very elegant way of not directly answering the question by mentioning the OSCE/ODIHR report. But, Ambassador, I would like you to give me a short assessment, if possible, on the main achievements and failures of the OSCE mission in Albania during your mandate.

Ambassador Wollfarth: "For me it was and is rewarding to be in Albania. I like Albanians, I like the country, and even in these three years, which has seen difficult political times as well, progress was visible, also the development of the minds of the citizens. I see more people interested now in public life. Also, civil society has grown. We would like to see more of it. We are not alone there, from the OSCE Presence. This is very important for integration, because integration into the European structures comes at so many levels and it is only complete when it really includes as many citizens as possible. Albania can profit from the families very often having some of their relatives living abroad – some of them nearby, some of them further away. That leads to also conveying some of the knowledge these family members acquire in other

countries – most, if not all of them, democracies. And that helps to stabilize also the situation here. But coming back to the question, what I liked in these three years is the development here on the ground, important moments like when a situation turned to the constructive: when an ombudsman was selected and elected, confirmed in the parliament; the Electoral Code reform; when my team largely could contribute to the Civil Code and Civil Procedure Code reforms – I think more than 90 per cent of what was developed there as proposals was included in the final steps; when we could do training for border police and other aspects. So, a lot of bigger and smaller picture contributions, work with the parliament, with the committees... Very rewarding, not only for me personally, but also for my team that will stay on the ground, and will continue the work in the service of the Albanian democracy.”

Ilva Tare: So, in general, you have a positive assessment. What about failures or deficiencies? Did the OSCE mission in Albania have any?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “(laughs) I cannot remember having my car parked in the wrong way ever. You are giving me a hard time. I would have liked to see even more achievements; since we only had legal and good plans, to see more rule of law, to see more done on the anti-corruption side. Now what it really costs me to find that where I would have liked to have seen, where my team and others, where we would have liked to see more progress, is in the final registration of properties. Because there we helped to clarify and to prepare dossiers, but the final registration in the overwhelming majority of the cases did not take place yet, and this is certainly a burden to those who want to invest, to many of them in the tourism sector, and this is one of the sectors where lot of employment could be created. So, this is certainly something where we would have liked to see more development, and maybe that is coming soon. The need for that is still there.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador, regarding your assessment, I would like to ask you about the role the OSCE has had in the developments of the last decade in Albania in the framework of human rights, rule of law, and also of a debate which has started years ago. I found a recent statement of Dashamir Shehi, a distinguished right-wing Albanian politician, who called on the OSCE to leave the country since, according to him, it has messed things up and didn’t manage to avoid the manipulation of elections. Let’s have a look at a short clip of what he said and then I would ask you for your comment.

Dashamir Shehi: For several years the OSCE and ODIHR have tried to do something in Albania, but I do not know where their assistance consists in. It is time for these institutions to leave; they only mess things up and serve as some kind of filter for Albanians not to understand anything. They know that elections have always been manipulated here, starting from the “Dushk” phenomenon and the current so-called “Spanish” system. They really want things in Albania not to go well.

Ilva Tare: Is it time to leave Albania because the situation is not as positive as you assess?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “This is his right. This is a fine example that there is a liberty of opinion that can be expressed. This is certainly one of the advantages of Albania and we were happy to support that this situation is as it is. You would not be surprised: I have a completely

different opinion. We are here, for all these years, on the invitation of the Albanian government. Our task is to help to stabilize and make the democratic institutions more viable, to see and help for human rights and for the rule of law. Stabilization of democratic institutions – this is proceeding; rule of law – there is still a lot of work to do. Some of these big items I just mentioned two sentences ago, like anti-corruption, including the judicial sector. The best news is so far in the human rights sector. There Albania has made great progress, also on the side where it is not so visible, but some work even there remains to be done when it comes to minorities. But it is a pretty good situation. Albania has developed a lot with the support of the OSCE Presence in Albania, but also with other international partners. This is a joint work, but very beneficial. Building on this, I think our mandate – how our tasking is being called, which has been formulated together with the Albanian government – is half way through. So, the other part of the work still needs to be done and all what we do is also helping to build the platform that is needed for European integration. So, this is common work for a better, a more solid, future of Albania. And when some people have a negative opinion, I hope they will be convinced one day, but we continue the work with the government.”

Ilva Tare: Do you think the OSCE will stay for a long time in Albania and on whom or what does the stay of the OSCE depend?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “This is a joint decision being taken by the participating States, as the members are called, together in Vienna. It is 57 member states. Clearly the host country, Albania, the Albanian government, has an important say. There is still a couple of years of work to do. It will certainly depend on how quickly Albania proceeds in the reform agenda. The quicker Albania moves ahead and becomes a solid democracy, the earlier we are not necessary anymore. We will certainly not stay forever, but when that mission then is accomplished, then we are not necessary anymore, and then the mission will be step by step also reduced and one day closed. But this is certainly not within the next couple of years. This is most likely a longer-lasting task.”

Ilva Tare: There has been another speculation in the media: your departure only a few days after the elections. Was it premature? Was it expected? Where will you go? What will your future mission be?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “In diplomatic life, the changes are quite regular. So in my diplomatic service – I am from Germany – three years is more or less the standard. And this is quite the usual time also when serving as a head of mission, in this case head of presence in Albania. So it did not really come as a surprise, but it came much quicker than I expected. Because I like working here and it is a beautiful country. The people are nice – not all of them when they are driving the car, but nobody is perfect.”

Ilva Tare: Do you know what your future mission will be? What will your role be?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes, I know.”

Ilva Tare: But we cannot make it public, right?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The agreement is underway with the future host country, so let me be a little bit cautious. But I am looking forward to it. It was high on my wish list, so I am really looking forward to that next posting.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador Wollfarth, there is an impression – the media have commented, made analysis, often even criticized and sometimes praised – that during your mission you have been closer to the stances of certain politicians, especially from the majority. In fact, it wasn’t like that. Such criticism was reconsidered when you presented your annual reports on Albania’s situation, which showed that despite possible friendships, when it came to reporting it was objective and true. I would like to have a direct answer from you on the following question. Do you think that Albanians mix up friendship and profession and work? If yes, has any politician turned sour because of your professional reports and personal relations? Maybe, given the fact that you are leaving, you could give us a more direct and sincere answer.

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I would say friendship and work, when talking about business, can go along. But when it is about the OSCE work, I clearly have to stick to something that helps the whole country, and this is sometimes a difficult and also a critical path, because it is not liked by either side. This is not to be harsh to anybody. It is trying to contribute to find a constructive way forward, and the constructive way forward, when working for the OSCE in support of Albania, is a way based on the rule of law. This sometimes leads to these challenges, but in the end, it is understood that it is to the benefit of the country, and the happy consequence is that in the end this truthful, this right way, prevails. It leads sometimes to difficult moments, but this makes life more interesting, too. So, I do not have any hard feelings. I would not say this is because I was here, but I was happy to see Albania grow. In many respects, in both political camps, it is a more mature country than it was three years ago, and will continue to mature. It is not only depending on me. At least it is my wish. I would like to say that, because this is certainly not my last day here. I will certainly come back one day. And when seeing the development and also the expectations of the people, I can only invite to work on it, to play as a team, to work together on the reform agenda, compete with good ideas, and build the country. And building – everybody knows that – is more difficult than destroying.”

Ilva Tare: Of course, the relations have been challenging with some of the politicians, whose names you will not reveal. Or will you?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “No. No, no, no, but I am sure there are some educated guesses [laughs].”

Ilva Tare: I guess they are from the majority. Or are they from the opposition as well?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Well, we had lively discussions in all directions, and that was also helpful, I think, for both sides. Because that’s what it is about: to find at the end a common solution.”

Ilva Tare: What happened to the ambassadors’ troika? Are you ambassadors still friends? Will you monitor 23 June? We haven’t seen much of you in the public. Will we see you at events similar to the 8 May ones or do you have challenges in your relations to face as well?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “No, no challenges that I am aware of. We met, but most of our meetings are in private. We are good friends, and we will certainly continue to be good friends. So, there is no change. But indeed, in these times, in campaigning times, the main turf should be for the ones that are campaigning. The citizens have the right to hear as much as possible from them. Media coverage on campaigning events is provided and I find that very important. This is more important than listening all the time to foreigners, I would say. I would say really this is due to the electoral situation and that’s ok. But don’t think that we are not good friends. We are excellent friends.”

Ilva Tare: Since you mentioned the media and their role in the elections, is the decision of the Central Election Commission to broadcast the tapes prepared by the political parties, turning the media into some kind of propaganda loudspeaker of the political parties, acceptable from the ethical point of view of independent journalism? What is your comment?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Allow me to cite myself. Sometimes repeats are a burden. Because during the 2011 campaign, there was the same question on the table. It is quite clear. While for the publicity it is ok that it is party material, but why should journalistic work be replaced by something readymade from the parties? Journalistic work should not be propaganda. It should be a truthful attempt to provide information for the citizens as journalistic work, reporting on facts, and then, on occasions, added or complemented by an opinion piece. So, any such decision should be challenged, but that I would leave to the media. The media discussion that came from the media was there. The media can be very strong and are very strong in Albania, so there was no need for public remarks. This is a prime turf for the media, and, as I hoped, this reaction came. I will not say how to respect or not to respect laws, because laws usually should be respected, but they can also be challenged.”

Ilva Tare: Interesting. An invitation to the media to challenge this decision of the Central Election Commission. I have many questions, Ambassador, but time has run out and apparently we will have to do another interview before or after your departure. But could you tell me in a couple of sentences what would you remember from Albania as the OSCE Ambassador – about the way Albanians do politics, how they behave with the institutions? The other question is what would you remember from Albania as Eugen Wollfarth?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “We have talked so much about institutions. Let me give my personal impressions. It is a very hospitable, it is a beautiful country. The biggest thing I will remember is hospitality, this human warmth, its openness. This is really a prime quality in Albania. I have also seen the pride of Albanians growing in the context of this 100 years celebration. Albanians should get used to walking through the front door in the future and not always looking for side doors or back doors, which seems to be still a national sport here. So, going with pride through the front door, working for it and getting the benefit. When that is reached, then I am really happy. Otherwise, I consider myself a friend of Albanians. I liked working here. I will certainly also come back and I will keep the memory of that great hospitality. That hospitality is in a country with a fantastic countryside: mountains, sea, valleys, and a couple of other really beautiful aspects will add to it. I will have nice memories.”

Ilva Tare: We are glad that we have shown you our best part, our hospitality. To conclude, the last question as citizen Wollfarth: do you think that we will conduct free and fair elections on 23 June? If you put aside for one moment the hat of the OSCE Ambassador, what would be your perception?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Free? Yes. Fair? This needs constant watch and it is not over yet. So, keep watching, that’s my invitation; keep working on it. It is not too late to fill up the CEC, but any moment in that election process needs attention and goodwill engagement and this is not over yet.”

Ilva Tare: Ambassador Wollfarth, thank you for participating in *Tonight* today and for sharing your opinions and messages to the Albanian people.

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Thank you, Ilva. It was a pleasure to be here, back on *Tonight with Ilva Tare*.”

Ilva Tare: Thank you, dear viewers. As OSCE Ambassador Wollfarth said, be attentive till the last day. Nothing is over yet with regard to 23 June. Good night!

END