



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE *WE, THE PEOPLE; CITIZENS PARTICIPATION AND
DIRECT DEMOCRACY*
2 February 2017**

I am pleased to be here with you today to discuss citizens' role in democracy.

Democracy etymologically speaking means: 'power of the people'; it means that the ruling power of the country is not given to particular person or a group of persons, but to the members of the community as a whole. It is not only the right to elect and be elected but it is also a responsibility to hold a government true to its promises.

It is time for you, the people, to take control and be aware of your true power. On 18 June this year you will have a very important role as decision makers. You will choose your democratically elected parliament.

The biggest threat to democracy is that it is taken for granted, citizens that think that they cannot change the system that someone else should ensure the transparency and accountability of those they elect. Lately the OSCE has been pointed out for the failure of the electoral reform process, but have you asked your leaders why it has not advanced further? Do you really believe that the only way to ensure free and fair elections is by introducing technically fragile electronic voting/counting? It was in the news today that all ballots in the [Netherlands' election next month will be counted by hand](#) in order to preserve confidence in the electoral system.

I can tell you that we have been pushing, encouraging, calling for reforms and trying to make them happen since the last OSCE/ODIHR recommendations saw the light in 2013 and 2015. It is the obligation of each participating State, and in this case Albania, to address promptly the ODIHR recommendations. We have been offering technical support to implement them and we kept our promises when we offered to bring in high-level international elections expertise. There is still time to regulate financial reporting, to help avoid electoral fraud by increasing fines, to stop party tapes to be aired without control, and to ensure gender quotas. But, we cannot make the reform for you! It is in your hands to get involved, get engaged, come together and demand it.

There is a general thought that the OSCE and the internationals are here to guarantee free and fair elections. We are not. We are here to help, to advise, to share best international practices but we cannot significantly influence or legitimize behaviors or results.

The OSCE/ODIHR will monitor Albanian elections. Their international observers witness the elections and the conduct of the CEC, the commissioners, parties and voters. ODIHR issues a report on the elections and valuable recommendations on areas for improvement in order to meet international standards and respect national legislation. In the ODIHR reports you find important hints for improvement, but ODIHR is not a referee or a guarantor for clean

elections. All the international observers can do is give advice and try to see examples of good and bad practice, but they cannot significantly change behaviors or results.

If you want free and fair elections ask your political parties to deliver. It's in their hands - on the way they raise their money, the way they campaign, the candidates they put forward on their lists, the people they choose as commissioners in polling stations and the way they count the votes – to guarantee free and fair elections. There is still time to tighten the electoral code, but the clock is ticking.

Keep one thing in mind – you the citizens of Albania are the most important force to ensure free and fair elections. You will decide if you will sell your vote or not. You will decide to photograph your ballot, or not. You decide to accept the exploitation of public service hierarchies, or not. You decide to be a clean Commissioner, or not. You decide to tolerate crimes against the electoral law, or not. You will decide to show up, or not on Election Day. “We get the democracy we deserve.” On Monday June 19th, the morning after, Albania's citizens will have the result they deserve and the leaders they deserve.

Democracy begins with you. Please, don't take it for granted.