



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

**REMARKS BY HEAD OF PRESENCE, AMBASSADOR EUGEN WOLLFARTH
AT ELECTORAL REFORM ROUNDTABLE**

27 October 2010

Ambassador Nesho,
distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen,
good morning!

Can I say, first of all, how delighted I am to be with you here to discuss a topic that is of some considerable political importance at this time.

In talking about '*elections and the challenges of electoral reform in Albania*' the details of any reform should be for Albanians and Albanians alone to discuss, agree and ultimately implement.

That said, I am sure that no one will object if friends of this country, least not those with a mandate specifically on elections and electoral reform, offer some thoughts about the more general aspects of the process.

First of all, I think that it is important to point out and acknowledge that the existing Electoral Code, passed back in 2008, introduced some very significant improvements.

In fact, the 2009 OSCE/ODIHR Final Report stated that most of the OSCE commitments were met.

However, as we also know, the Report also states with equal clarity that: "While meeting most OSCE commitments, these elections did not fully realize Albania's potential to adhere to the highest standards for democratic elections."

So it is clear that further electoral reform is necessary.

And we must assume that such a view is also shared amongst the Albanian political class given the widespread participation in last Friday's roundtable.

So we can agree that reform is important.

What we now need to establish is what type reform is needed now.

Put simply, and without wishing to labour the point, with the date of 8 May 2011 now firmly in our minds, I would argue that the electoral reform debate could and should be divided into two separate chapters:

i) One half to be developed now relating to local government elections

ii) A second half on reform of parliamentary elections to take place straight after local government elections.

Is there a risk that a debate on electoral reform may end up mixing up both issues?

Yes, I think there probably is.

All I can assume is that the political class also aware of this trap and will find suitable ways around this trap.

I am convinced that public events, such as the one we are in this morning, are perfect opportunities to also raise such concerns, especially when we consider that we have among us one Chair and two former Chairs of the Central Elections Commission.

Either way, in terms of any electoral reform, I believe that any process should be fully consulted upon widely.

Any reform should seek the widest possible political consensus so that any agreed reform can last the '*test of time*' and is not summarily ditched or at least heavily as has frequently been the case in the past.

Given the mandate of the Presence, you will not be surprised to hear me say also that any reform package should, of course, be based around the principles of the rule of law and the Albanian Constitution.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, as you will know, when you thumb through the 2009 Final OSCE-ODIHR Report, there are some 31 recommendation cited.

Although you will be relieved to know that I shall refrain from commenting upon each and every recommendation listed, I would like to draw your attention to the first recommendation listed relating to the role of political parties.

This recommendation is important, crucial and critical to any successful reform and more widely to the successful conduct of local government elections next May.

Let me spell out the recommendation:

“Parties should demonstrate the political will for the conduct of democratic elections commensurate with the broad privileges they enjoy under the law in regard to the conduct of elections.

They should discharge their electoral duties in a responsible manner for the general interest of Albania.”

Again: “They should discharge their electoral duties in a responsible manner for the general interest of Albania.”

This passage is compelling, convincing and needs no explanatory note.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

Let us not forget that there are only 28 weeks left before Election Day next May with the 'Electoral Clock', so to speak, clicking down at a rapid and alarming pace.

Local government elections have to happen and they have to happen in a professional manner where all and not just some of the OSCE commitments are met.

The task, as I see it, is for the country to finally and irrevocably turn the page to the story of problematic elections in Albania.

It is now time for all political parties to put the national interest first and to fulfil this important task.

Last Friday was a good start.

But it can only be a start.

The time is ticking, elections are coming, and there is no time to lose.

Thank you very much.