

**Transcript of interview on TV Klan's *Opinion* show hosted by Blendi Fevziu
Ambassador Wollfarth's quotes**

21 April 2011

TV Klan: Good evening, honourable viewers. I am speaking from the *Opinion* studio for a somewhat special interview. It is an interview, as you have seen from the promo, with three ambassadors representing two institutions and one very important country in relation to Albania. They have been very active, not only in the campaign, but also during the pre-campaign. They are a group of three ambassadors that have moved to some cities and institutions in an attempt to convey a positive message for the electoral campaign and 8 May elections. We have EU Ambassador Ettore Sequi, who arrived in Tirana in January. We have OSCE Ambassador Eugen Wollfarth, who has been in Tirana since last September. And, we have U.S. Ambassador to Tirana Alexander Arvizu, who arrived here last December. Welcome, Ambassador Wollfarth, to Albania, and welcome to *Opinion*!

Ambassador Wollfarth: Thank you very much!

TV Klan: Ambassador Wollfarth, it is the first time that the Ambassadors are so active in the electoral campaign. Why in these elections?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Because these elections matter. Now we are looking forward to the local government elections on 8 May. It is for stabilizing this still young democracy. It has a track record of twenty years with 'ups' and 'downs'. We are allied in helping Albanians to find an even better way for Albania while building democracy. That is what unites us first of all. Coming from very different backgrounds, but still united. One large nation state, a model of a very early democracy, another one a supranational organization, the European Union, which Albania is striving for. The OSCE, Albania has firm commitments with the OSCE. The Presence in Albania is here to support Albanians in finding the best way to achieve these commitments as soon as possible.

TV Klan: But Ambassador Wollfarth, after your statements, not just the statements made by the Ambassadors, but even those made by the EU or the diplomats from the State Department, both parts in Albania, I mean the opposition and the majority or the power, they think or they promote them as support for themselves. That means can you be clearer with your messages or people misunderstand your messages here.

Ambassador Wollfarth: I do not think that there are misunderstandings. Quite the contrary. If they find themselves in what we do and support then that is good because democracy needs alternatives. It needs good offers, it needs good programmes, it needs good arguments, and there is already quite a lot in the election campaigning up to the local elections. This is very constructive, this gives us hope and hopefully that gives also hope to Albanians to look forward to an even better development, to an even better future.

TV Klan: Ambassador Wollfarth, this is the first campaign you follow in Albania. According to the other campaigns you have followed in Kosovo and other countries, what do you think about the campaign here?

Ambassador Wollfarth: First of all, I admire the courage of the candidates. And when they are coming up with programmes and presenting that since 2009 in quite upbeat environment, they do it in a generally very civilized and good way. I think this is really to be commended. This is a sovereign country and next year Albania is going to celebrate its 100 years of

independence. This is notable. As there is quite some progress, I do not see ingredients that are missing. Perhaps, a little bit more patience...

TV Klan: But just one forth of our history has been history of democratic and free elections.

Ambassador Wollfarth: The advantage is that you have so many good examples around from which to choose depending also, of course, on where you look. So a country like Albania does not have to be afraid of comparison at this stage. It is about good will. This is perhaps an element that I would like to see more of - political will in doing things right, in doing things in the spirit of helping democracy really work, in confidence building, and wanting to do every step in the general interest of having a due process - especially now with these elections. And this is something that I have said before. There has been a round table in the Assembly, a very good initiative and one that was about good political will because what is political will all about? When you agree across the aisle to do the things right, then you do not need such specific laws and regulations. Then you have a due process in campaigning, then you have a due process during Election Day, then you have a due counting process, then you have a civilized reaction from the winner, that is easy, and the hard part is from the loser in accepting the outcome. All that needs is good will and hopefully the portion of the good will that I see already will grow and will make this a very good and very viable election.

TV Klan: But after twenty years of free elections in Albania, Ambassador, the political parties have never accepted the results. The losers have always complained about the results.

Ambassador Wollfarth: This is certainly not a model to be continued. There I would like to see discontinuation and acceptance after, of course, a due process. This is part of the political will which I just tried to describe in accepting the *rules of the game*. The rules are also in the hands of the voters, and especially in the casting the ballot on Election Day, that is also to be truthfully counted and then, with a good will, accepted as the voters say it. On the local elections, of course, these are so many elections taking place at the same time because it is all over the country. It is for mayors and it is for municipal councils, so it will take a lot of people in having that good will and accepting the results. Some will be re-elected, some will be elected for the first time, some will not be re-elected. And from all of them, it needs the courage, the good will, and the discipline in accepting what Albanians as voters have decided.

TV Klan: And do you think this can change?

Ambassador Wollfarth: This is all achievable. Elections so far have had their *ups and downs* it is true. However, these elections come after the introduction of a new civil registry, of a new address system, and after the introduction of biometric ID cards and passports. So they are on a much sounder and much better basis. And that by the way was teamwork because it needed co-operation between national and local levels. I wish that this spirit of co-operation would continue. There were wishes left open, willingness to co-operate, but that again was part of the political will in cooperation, separating partisan issues from issues serving the national interest bringing Albania forward, move it toward even a more stable democracy, and to a really viable place for the daily life of its citizens.

TV Klan: Ambassador Wollfarth, we had a lot of problems or discussions between the Government and the opposition about the Central Election Commission. They wanted to change it, and the reaction of the OSCE, and also of the other institutions, was that there was not enough time to change the Central Election Commission. Was it a mistake made by you?

Ambassador Wollfarth: The important thing now is that the Central Election Commission is complete again, because the opposition-proposed members ceased to participate starting in January and now they are back. That is very important because it adds to transparency in decision-making. I do not think it is good thing to change the horse during the race. The Central Election Commission is a technical body, and it should do technical work.

TV Klan: They say it is a political body.

Ambassador Wollfarth: They all have liberty in saying that. In our view, it is a technical body, and it needs the contribution from all camps. According to the Electoral Code, there are four members proposed by the Government, three proposed by the opposition and all working together to finding good solutions. In previous Electoral Codes, it was different. It saw a much stronger role for the President. In this case, and now back to today, the Central Election Commission is back to normal in the sense that all seven members are participating. Also for them, of course, the good will in co-operating and in finding good technical solutions. They are technicalities in having what you have in the ballot paper, in filling how many voters are registered in one voting centre, that the voting centres are checked in a way that whenever possible that they are in a public place and so on. These are all technical things, but when you have an upbeat political environment, of course that has a positive influence on the decision-making. That is what we saw. That is why there was a disruption for a couple of weeks when the CEC had to proceed without the support of the opposition and then again it is only opposition members when you see it on a national level. Of course, it is the CEC, but perhaps we should also make clear that there is no clear government side and opposition side since these are local elections that are coming up, it is mixed. You have local government in many places, which are clearly not the same party as at the national level. So it is a mixed picture and they work for all of them, regardless of party affiliation. This technical work should be provided in the most professional way. It should be done for all, and not distinguished, so I think we were absolutely right. One of the key things in the Presence's mandate is in supporting the Government, the institutions, in the rule of law. Clearly the CEC is an institution of the state that should function neutrally, that should function smoothly with the co-operation of all members. Unfortunately we have not seen that without disruption, now it is more back to normal.

TV Klan: Do you trust this Commission, Ambassador Wollfarth?

Ambassador Wollfarth: The CEC is the only commission Albania has. Therefore, there is no choice, and we provide advice when needed in moving ahead with the technical steps needed. All the rest is politics, but that is up to the citizens to decide whether they buy it or not.

TV Klan: The problem is that a few days ago this Commission has blocked the transmission of two spots of the Socialist Party for two days. It was a unilateral decision on this point of view.

Ambassador Wollfarth: This is an analysis work to be done by experts. Perhaps there were some flaws, but it is not up to me to comment on that. When it comes to spots, I would say that it is complete liberty of the party what they send, but the more content, own content, presenting arguments they contain, the better it is.

TV Klan: Ambassador Wollfarth, you have spoken many times about the civil society. Do you think that the civil society of Albania can really have a responsibility on these elections?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Yes, I do! - for example in discussing the arguments, the programmes, and the suggestions that the candidates make, as well as in providing advice and

opinion to help the citizens to make up their minds. There are also some very good public discussions in the media on this and I would like to see more of this in the future. So, besides the candidates presenting themselves, and the political parties presenting their programmes, it would be good to have that piece of opinion from the media, but also from the civil society, in also coming up with suggestions for future elections. So there is an important space, which is not a vacuum here, but could be filled in a much more creative way.

TV Klan: But there is a perception that the civil society in Albania is split into two parts, one part supporting the left side and the other part supporting the right side. Do you think we really have a civil society, which should be up to the party?

Ambassador Wollfarth: We have it in the Presence's mandate to support the civil society, which means a multi-colour discussion. So I hope that civil society in the eyes of most people in this country is not split in two, but instead split in many parts to provide that lively discussion to come up in a good and civilized manner with good proposals as to how to move the country ahead in an even better and improved way. Therefore, that advice is needed for people that are doing it in a sort of, let us say, neutral way in this discussion, not being in the office providing advice, including also wishes, perceptions, and even some elements of utopia, while not being in the office, and there you can be more daring. When you are in the office, then you have to deliver, that is the real challenge for a politician after being elected, not just making a nice programme, but also to deliver. This civilized discussion is something that helps stimulate in finding good solutions for the country, and since we are heading local elections, also for a municipality, because now a solution that might be viable for a specific subject in Korça, may not be as viable in Elbasan, or you could talk about Kukës or Shkodra. So there is a lot to solve, and there are civil societies at the national level, there hopefully should also be some at the local level, depending on the size of the municipality. It is easier in cities than in smaller places.

TV Klan: Ambassador Wollfarth, what are the international standards for the elections? Twenty years we are discussing about those international standards. Every election will say better than the previous election, but still under the international standard. What does it mean international standard?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Let me give you a quick ride through it without getting too much into technicalities. Starting from what Ambassador Ettore Sequi has said – giving a truthful picture of what the voters wanted. But that includes even more. So it is definitely having a choice, different party programmes when you speak at the national level, different programmes for how to develop a city or municipality in a more local context. It is having a free choice that makes democracy, so not being ordered not to vote and having free access. This is for example voting centres only in public spaces, having a choice, having the possibility of going personally, one person-one vote, truthfully counted, accurate and complete voter lists with nobody omitted, nobody on the list that should not be there and a couple of other things, including having a clearly understood ballot sheet. It can be very simple. It depends on regulations. In some countries, it is the quality of newspaper paper, so relatively cheap. Having also a good and transparent counting process and a truthful one, and therefore having that photograph of what voters with free access and a choice wanted. It is as simple as that. One can put it in a complicated Code. One can put it in a simple Code. Some members of the European Union have a fairly short Electoral Code, so it is mainly the goodwill of volunteers, real volunteers coming from the parties, in doing their duty to the citizens in being present in the voting centres, in being present during counting procedures and doing it truthfully, honestly and with that good will. So that is the international standard. Of course, in real life, as it is a working process, also here in Albania, any list you make needs

revision and when you have many million people it needs constant revision, and this is why there is a difference between the preliminary voter lists and the final voter lists. If somebody moves afterwards, when asking a judge, he can be put on the list even six hours before the closing of a voting centre. So, it is a constant work in process, but it is doing it transparently and with a choice. That is what the international standard is about. There is nothing mystical about it, there is no secret, it is not magic. It is just the freedom of choice and really doing it.

TV Klan: Very difficult also...

Ambassador Wollfarth: Yes, and abstaining from helping the people casting their vote when they are not even present, like stuffing boxes which we have heard from the past. I hope we will never hear it again, or family voting and all these nasty things. It is one person-one vote process that will meet international standards.

TV Klan: But I think this problem of family voting should be very difficult to be resolved. I think also in the South Italy for a long time it has been a characteristic of the votes. Do you really think in Albania we can find a solution to this kind of vote. It is not a characteristic of the urban area, but especially in the rural area.

Ambassador Wollfarth: I do not want to sound funny, but it is about just not doing it. Because it is also about the citizens. It is not delegating honesty and truthfulness to others. It is being truthful to every single voter as well in the families and not accepting such practices. So if you do not even attempt it, then the volunteers in the voting centres do not have to control it and can focus on the other things: checking the IDs, checking the voter lists – one vote-one ballot – that is how it should be done. The goodwill starts with the people. It is like safety, which we touched upon earlier – this is not a duty of police only. In the ideal case, they are there, they are present like a catalytic converter for a better process, and when the citizens behave, the police are not necessary. But maybe they behave better because the police are present and take action when needed. But it starts with the goodwill of the people, and it is needed in the whole process, and not only for election. It is a basic truth for running society. It starts with good behaviour, being a law-abiding citizen and especially on Election Day it should be done.

TV Klan: But do you think that this Code will guarantee the international standards for Albania?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Yes, it can be done. The current Code seems to be focused more on parliamentary elections and it would be good to add in the future, after a mutual agreement, some provisions specializing on the necessities for local elections. That is not there yet. But the Electoral Code, as it is, is good enough to reach international standards.

TV Klan: Until now, Ambassador, we did not have - except the elections of 1996 which were a disaster – problems on the day of the elections. The problems started when the counting of votes started or a part seemed to lose the elections. What can we do for not having the same situation?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Due process, due counting and accepting the result.

TV Klan: To accept the results... should be easy?

Ambassador Wollfarth: It should be the easiest thing in the world, because that is respecting the voters' voice.

TV Klan: Who will give the certificate of the results?

Ambassador Wollfarth: This is the Albanian people, the Albanian institutions. What we do from the international side, and especially ODIHR, is observing the Albanian process. These are ‘Albanian elections’, some 384 counting all the mayors’ election in the different places and the one for the municipal councils. This is certified by Albanians in the Commissions of Electoral Administrative Zones. They certify it, so it is Albanians certifying that it was a due process, while ODIHR and others observing, and then, in the end, the CEC composed through seven members are also double checking. So that is the first instance. And if doubts are left, then one can appeal as they have done sometimes in the past, sometimes they have not done it, they have just talked about it. So, there are legal provisions that can be used if necessary.

TV Klan: Ambassador, how many foreign observers will we have for the elections?

Ambassador Wollfarth: I can tell you what we can provide from the OSCE/ODIHR side. This is roughly 500 persons.

TV Klan: 500 persons?

Ambassador Wollfarth: 500 persons. But I cannot tell you the complete figure, because there might be ad hoc also visiting parliamentarians from a larger variety of countries. I understand that other bodies like the Council of Europe are also thinking of sending additional observers, but I haven’t gotten any clear figure yet. There is a large interest and that should also be seen as a large sign of solidarity to the Albanian people in helping. Also in sort of a reduced role, like a catalytic converter, while the process is a truly Albanian process, in helping and having a really good Election Day, and a good time, constructive time after election day. We have great support such as ODIHR, like all our work in the OSCE, supported by participating States, including the US, including Albania, as well, since Albania is also a participating State, of course.

TV Klan: Ambassador Wollfarth, when will be the first statement of ODIHR about the election?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Given that the counting process, the decentralized counting process might be lengthy they will probably not give it on 9 May. Mr. Jonathan Stonestreet, who is leading the core team of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission, was considering in having a statement on Tuesday, two days later.

TV Klan: Is it not too late?

Ambassador Wollfarth: It is depending on the speed of the counting. It clearly makes sense, because it will be two times 384 elections, when you see the mayoral and the municipal elections, and that might quite take some time for the results and also for the observations on the counting process to come in to give a more precise first impression. So it makes sense and it is just the first step, because afterwards, there will be, quite some weeks later, the report of the ODIHR Mission of what they have seen in the campaign, on election day, in the counting process, after the election day. So, this is nothing to be done hastily. This is certainly something that needs time and two days, given the number of different elections, that is not too much. I think this is already quite swift.

TV Klan: Ambassador Wollfarth, we had this big problem in the last two or three elections, which is the standard of the news coming from the parties and not covered by the media. What is your opinion about that?

Ambassador Wollfarth: The media should report freely and provide good journalistic work. This means having access to at least parts at these events’ and then providing facts to the viewers. Then they can add opinion pieces to it making clear that is ‘comment’. What is not

so good is journalistic work that is somehow sort of mixing it, without making it clear it to the viewer where it comes from. Good journalistic work is first and direct access and having a good, solid, professional journalistic product. This is preferable from ready-made footages, because this is sometimes only one step from party propaganda. Nothing is wrong with party propaganda as long as the viewer knows that it is now publicity and party propaganda. That is also fully acceptable. That is part of campaigning and it should be part of campaigning, but one clearly should not mix the things. It should be clearly separated professional journalistic work from publicity work. As long as that is provided, the voter, the citizen, the human being watching it has a chance to make up his or her mind.

TV Klan: Ambassador Wollfarth, what do you think about the two main parties' leaders? I know that it is always difficult to talk about leaders, but...

Ambassador Wollfarth: Both Prime Minister Berisha and Mayor Rama are absolutely, leaders of their parties. They have charisma and we had, in different opportunities, quite some interesting discussions and exchanges, especially looking forward. One concern they both have is in serving to the citizens, they have a clear mind. I purposely say both, in fighting corruption and having more and growing honesty. Earlier this morning this discussion on corruption, was also on the line, that nobody in any country of the world is free of that, that is a work in progress, it needs all sides, at all levels, and they clearly have an eye on that and that is very important. They provide alternatives. You can have it in one colour or the other colour. This is very important. By providing that offer to the citizens, that is clearly a service to the society. I would like to see more co-operation, and there the first step is certainly with Prime Minister Sali Berisha since he is the head of the government in being more forthcoming towards the opposition, in making an offer to have a dialogue on the really important issues in moving the country forward. While, at the same time, from the opposition, I would expect more constructive steps. As I look to the future, I do not want to see steps like boycotts and strikes and things like that again. It is being repeated in neighbouring countries, and it is leading nowhere. The importance is that the leaders really lead Albania to the future and there I expect more discipline – less blue and less red, more Albania. And that is where I see insufficiencies. Now this, of course, is the 'big national scheme', we are headed towards local elections. 8 May is a much riskier day for the candidate Rama than for the Prime Minister Berisha.

TV Klan: Why?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Because it is not the Election Day for Prime Minister. So we should refocus. While both are chairs of the leading parties, it is certainly a high task to manage Tirana. Mr. Rama has been re-elected several times, so, in the past there was a high level of confidence, apparently, in his work. It is now for the voters to decide if the same is true. Likewise when parliamentary elections come up one day for Prime Minister Berisha and his government whether the people trust them. But now we are certainly looking at 8 May, at local elections, a very important day because that will decide on a local level, in all the cities, towns and municipalities, how the management of *day-to-day* life is being done by the mayors and by the municipal councils. So, therefore, there is quite something at stake and if I may add a wish, it is also in separating that service part from the party competition.

TV Klan: Ambassador, what will you personally do on the day of the elections? Will you stay in Tirana or travel?

Ambassador Wollfarth: I will certainly be in Albania. I have not completely decided where to be on that day. Most likely, of course, the capital always has the highest attraction, so most likely I will spend the day here, but to be really honest, I have not made up my mind.

TV Klan: What is your message to Albanian voters for 8 May?

Ambassador Wollfarth: Go and vote! Make your choice. Trust that your voice, your vote, your ballot will count and is counted truthfully and look forward to a peaceful future. Contribute, but first, go and vote.

Ends