



Organization for Security and
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Presence in Albania

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S INTERVIEW WITH ALBANIAN SCREEN

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Q: Mr. Ambassador, the third mandate of the electoral reform committee expires today. This is the third prolongation, but it seems that the situation now is more escalated as ever. Can we call this a failure?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The work of the ad hoc committee on Electoral Code reform was very intensive and is still very intensive, because they are meeting during the day to wrap up what they have done so far. Very important progress was marked in the past and that will need decision making later in the plenary. Let me just highlight that on the voters’ list, on voting procedures, on ballot counting and on gender – to name just a couple of issues – very important proposals have been made and preliminarily agreed so far. Therefore, I would rather see it as a success story, which is still ongoing. It is not terminated yet – that was the third part of the electoral code reform ad hoc committee after two prolongations, but now the remaining part will be left to the Law Committee and the plenary to decide. I would invite for quick and swift action, because clarity is needed also to prepare for the next elections. Time is running, the clock is ticking. It might seem to the ordinary citizen that it is a long time ahead, but there is very much to prepare and time for that is needed also to get used to the new Code. So I invite for swift continuation of what I would call so far very successful work of the ad hoc committee.”

Q: Another greatly advertised consensus of the work of the committee was the use of new Technologies in the net elections. But ODIHR suggested against the electronic counting the voters’ identification. Isn’t Albania ready for such a step?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The OSCE/ODIHR has really very broad experience. They are present during elections and preparations in many countries – some of them typical western democracies, others newly developing democracies. So what they recommend is based on their experience. When you introduce a new system, especially when you take complex steps, you take the time in introducing them and you also step by step develop the capacities in handling complex installations. And the time, I come back to that, is running. The clock is ticking, the time is developing and a lot of screening and a lot of steps need to be taken to apply that also here in Albania. So what ODIHR did is giving an advice, based on their experience how to handle it that it leads to success. Success is what Albania needs, success is what the citizens of Albania need. This is also what the new parliament then after next general elections need and not again turmoil and blockade. So,

success is needed and that comes by a step-by-step approach, not doing everything at the same time.”

Q: So, in your opinion, should the parties withdraw from this consensus or they should rather complete the legal basis that they are working on, avoiding this way manipulations?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The important issue in all elections is to have the political will to play to the rules. Machines can help, like in electronic ballot counting, like with ID card readers, but this is the important starting point. I wish the political will would be stronger and I would like to see more of this for the next elections. The politicians have a large influence on their followers and it starts with the leaders in building up that trust. That is exactly what I would call for: building trust, and that starts with building consensus. Consensus comes through dialogue, talking together, introducing good viable ideas, checking, counterchecking these ideas and making up a joint draft, because a set of elections is something needed to serve the country in the spirit of democracy. So this is clearly an issue where the highest possible degree of consensus is needed, based on compromise, and that means a common draft. And therefore the work done so far in the ad hoc electoral code reform committee is excellent; it is a common work, it involves the major political camps not limited only to two parties. That is very important. We see extremely good elements in that draft. A couple of - I would qualify in comparison to that - minor questions are still open, so I see all chances that we will soon see a good electoral code reform here in Albania and that outlook makes me happy. I think this is what Albania deserves.”

Q: Another issue that seems to have block the work of the committee in his last day is electoral administration. How do you see as a successful formula the SP proposal that the CEC Chair is proposed by the People's Advocate, the President and other institutions?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Proposals like that would mean returning to at least in parts to the previous system where the CEC was not nominated by the parties only. There are good reasons for that, but that again was reversed by the parties in their last decision. What Albania needs is forward-looking long-prospective decisions and not changing everything at any time to the chair’s liking. More responsibility, more forward looking is needed and what we expect as an international community – because it also leads to social peace and peace is not only limited to one country anymore – what we expect is good technical work of the Central Election Commission giving a clear picture of what the voters want precisely on election day, I repeat: precisely. This is technical work and should not be under political influence. If politicians can guarantee that, it is ok, if they cannot guarantee they have to face the question with all its consequences and it is in the hand of the voters to react accordingly. Everybody, not only in Albania, should be considering that.”

Q: Would a return to the old system be harmful for the CEC or it could rather guarantee some kind of trust?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I can only answer that there is no guarantee for trust. That needs to build. This comes through dialogue and co-operation and playing to the rules. What the country needs to see is the Central Election Commission doing good technical work without interference. Because interfering into the Central Election Commission’s work while they are proceeding is quite similar to interfering into police work or into what judges do in court. The CEC has to be brought into a position that it can work, and do the technical work which is the precise preparation, precise execution and precise work after the elections. If the politicians, the parties can agree on a platform that allows that, then it is fine, if there are shortcomings, they need to be reviewed. Now all the ingredients are there for good preparations for the next general elections and, of course, I invite to make good use of that platform, come to that platform, finalize it, decide on it and then apply the rules, stick to the rules.”