

INTERVIEW/Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania Pavel Vacek gives solution for duplicate names

New Lists, with Central Election Commission Help

Vacek: Ministry of Local Government must set up the centre

By Blerina Gjoka

The OSCE representative in Tirana, Ambassador Pavel Vacek, considers the issue of cleaning up duplications from the voter lists to be a problem that regards many institutions. In an exclusive interview with Gazeta Shqiptare, Vacek explains the way the process should follow. According to him, this process necessitates the support of the Central Election Commission (CEC), the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization (MLGD), and especially that of the municipalities and communes. The ultimate task and responsibility for eliminating duplications stands with the mayors. Only they can change the voter lists and add or remove people from them, Vacek stressed. During discussions on the Electoral Code, the CEC offered its assistance with regard to the voter register. An investment amounting to almost 4 million USD was made at the CEC. However, the Democratic Party ruled out a possible CEC participation in the process, and that was also supported by the OSCE. Now, Vacek is stressing the importance the CEC has in the process. As the elections time is approaching, the voter lists keep being a hostage of a legal vacuum.

1. What is the deadline for clearing up the duplications in the voter lists?

I understand that by 15 March 2005, all the mayors of local government units where citizens are registered in temporary registers should notify the mayors in the places where these respective citizens have permanent residence of the existence of the temporary residence. In this way, the mayors of the local government units of citizens' permanent residence will be able to avoid duplicate entries in the voter lists. From 1 April until 25 days prior to election day, when the Final Voter List is approved, the General Directorate of Civil Registry (GDCR) at the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization (MLGD) is expected to inform the mayors of potential duplicates in the voter lists that will have been prepared by the mayors. The GDCR should identify such duplicates after verification at national level of all lists which have been provided to the GDCR in an electronic format by all mayors. To be able to check for potential duplicates, the GDCR should process all individual lists coming from the mayors into a nationwide database. We speak of the need to have such a centralized data processing facility within the Ministry because it is obvious that it is physically impossible to properly conduct such a check on the level of individual mayors – each of them would have to simultaneously communicate with hundreds of other mayors (which are not

connected by any established and reliable communication network) and the result may be a mess. The duplicates which may occur in the registers may be of various kind, by and large whenever one citizen is registered in more than one place at a time and there are corresponding ways to remedy that.

2. If the clearing-up of the duplications in the voter lists would not be done in time, what would be its cost to the elections?

The duplicate registration is not only undesirable as such but also constitutes a serious violation of the Electoral Code. Of course, there are other possible safeguards to avoid multiple voting, e.g. marking the voters who have cast their vote with special ink (on the voter's thumb). Such measures are not a panacea, however, they add costs to the whole process and require a consistent across-the-board application by all voting centre commissions in order to be efficient.

3. The Electoral Code does not say which institution should take care of the clearing-up of the duplications? How will this be solved?

In that regard, the Code is not as finite as it should be ideally, however there is no total legal vacuum. We believe that the three institutions most concerned, i.e. the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization, the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the mayors, should actively co-operate guided by the common purpose. The CEC should share the whole of its know-how expertise and data with the Ministry, the Ministry should set up the centralized data processing facility, notify the mayors of the duplications and possible errors, and the mayors should actively seek advice and support from the Ministry in doing their principal job, i.e. in compiling the voter lists, which are their ultimate responsibility.