

Remarks made by Head of OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Eugen Wollfarth, on electoral reform and immunity issue, Bedër University, Tirana

13 March 2012

Question: We are all witnesses of the fact that every time there is an election, there is also an electoral code reform bringing new changes. Do these changes have a positive effect, and what is expected to happen this year with the electoral code reform?

Ambassador Wollfarth: The Electoral Code reform is very important, first of all to give a clear, a technical and photographic picture of what voters want on Election Day. In the last election, of course, it was especially tricky, because it was more than a photo finish within the capital here in Tirana and led to some additional and not foreseen situations in the Electoral Code, also on what to do with all these cast ballots in different boxes. This shows that very technical questions on the placement of ballots can become very political when it comes in a close race having an influence on the result. It is just one practical example from the longer list that the OSCE/ODIHR, through Election Observation, has recommended for being revisited during the Electoral Code reform process. So now with this experience from the last elections, also the 2009 general elections, the Code, this is a tasking, will be improved, so that the CEC will be in a better technical position to provide that service to the citizens and of course that also includes the political parties. And that should help to build the trust of the citizens in the system, that their vote counts and it is counted correctly for a truthful result whether they elect for general elections to parliament or for mayors or city parliament. It is very important now that the interest of the common citizen is being kept up, that the time is being used. You might have read or heard that the time has been extended for the ad hoc committee on Electoral Code Reform until the end of April to come up with commonly developed proposals for the future Electoral Code. It is very important to build that confidence between the parties that the CEC functions in a proper and purely technical way. That will set even more energy free for other parts of the ongoing very important reform process, which then again is very important for European integration, just to name the most important ones in my eyes: the judicial reform, the parliamentary reform.

Question: Mr. Rama agreed to vote in favour of the lifting of immunity as part of the judicial reform. His statement is in line with those of the Prime Minister and Assembly Speaker. How do you see this move?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “This is an important contribution to the extremely important discussion. Immunity should only be used for serving the people, for nothing else, and there should be limits. I am in favour of an early solution and of early voting.”

Question: Do you think that the political class has now found the way of co-operation and communication and maybe we are close now to the candidate status or is there something more that we are not aware of?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I can only answer from an OSCE Presence point of view and it (the candidate status) is much closer, it is getting closer, but more work needs to be done. The reform process must continue - Electoral Code reform, parliamentary reform, judicial reform to name the most important ones. I certainly wish for a positive recommendation, but the decision in the end lies with the European Commission’s recommendation to member states.”

Question: On the issue of immunity, what do you think is best: amending the Constitution or the ruling majority’s option for individual initiation of immunity lifting?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I am sure a good solution can be found jointly in the parliament. The Constitution should not be touched every day.”