

Remarks of the Head of Presence

Workshop of General Prosecutor's Office and Central Election Commission on Application of Decriminalization Law - Lessons Learned and Steps Ahead

Tirana, 12 March 2019

Venue: Illyria 3, MAKAlbania Hotel and Towers

So, good morning, dear General Prosecutor, dear Chair of the Central Election Commission, dear national and international partners, dear friends!

It is with really great pleasure to come here to be with you during the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on your co-operation in the context of the 30 June local elections. This is a very positive step forward in the co-operation between the Central Election Commission and the General Prosecutor's Office.

And it sets a foundation for a more efficient fight against electoral fraud as well as for a more efficient cleansing of the candidates lists from law offenders or those under penal investigation.

We have been advocating for this agreement, and this afternoon and during the rest of the day, colleagues, specialists will discuss how to implement it best.

Both the Central Election Commission and the General Prosecutor's Office are legally entrusted to clean electoral lists of persons whose criminal record excludes the integrity necessary to exercise public functions and to guarantee the trust of the public in the functioning of the State bodies, such as the Assembly and others, at a critical moment here in Albania.

This is, and I am very much aware of that, a demanding task, made even more cumbersome by law provisions that sometimes appear to fall short of clarity and require interpretative efforts and fast decisions, especially now, as time is running short: we are only a short few months ahead of local elections in June. And after months of far-reaching progress on drafting amendments to the current electoral legislation, according and based on OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, there was no final vote in the Assembly unfortunately.

And yet, I am confident that the professionalism and independence of the offices will allow you to reach a common understanding on key issues and move forward.

I think that Albania needs this move forward even more so today, when political allegations about the integrity of elections undermine public trust, while also demeaning the democratic process and hindering proper institutional functioning.

I strongly encourage the participants in today's workshop to focus on the decriminalization of electoral lists to have an open, practical and result-oriented discussion, based on best practices and vast experience that each and every one of you has on the topic.

As ODIHR points out in its final report of the 2017 legislative elections, the Albanian authorities should prioritize to work to address the persistent issue of widespread allegations of vote-buying, which have affected public trust in the elections. And that is a strong sentence. Serious efforts from all sides are needed to address this phenomenon. Efficient prosecution is a central tool to fight vote-buying. Better co-operation with the CEC will help in this field. Today's Memorandum of Understanding and discussion about the efficient implementation are an excellent basis for this.

Another OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, which I would like to recall, is that Albanian authorities should also investigate all complaints of abuse of state resources and employment-related pressures on voters: these are important actions that you should take whenever necessary, with no delays.

And the OSCE/ODIHR report recommends setting up a transparent, independent and inclusive body to supervise these state institutions, the use of state resources and employment-related pressures.

We are following to see the cases of electoral violations reported to the General Prosecutor's Office are followed up on, while eagerly waiting for concrete results coming out of the collaboration of your respective institutions.

As OSCE Presence, of course, we continue to be ready to support your efforts, in accordance with these recommendations.