

Interview with Ambassador Jose Luis Herrero, Head of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje for daily newspaper in Albanian language Lajm, 10 April 2009

Interviewer: Laura Papraniku

Q: These elections were overall assessed as peaceful. Do you consider there is a place for complaints from political parties?

Herrero: In many aspects, the latest elections were much better than the previous ones. The proper word in this case would be “progress”. So, there was a progress, but were they perfect? No, since there were local problems in certain municipalities and as a result, we had complaints from the political parties. We also had cases of voters’ intimidation in certain places, while in the Albanian part of the country we can say the elections were very well conducted if we consider the past elections when a big number of problems were marked in the Albanian populated areas. We should be very pleased and congratulate the Albanian political parties and citizens, who managed an electoral process free of violence and incidents.

Q: Speaking of the progress, how much time does Macedonia need in order to have fewer observers in the future?

Herrero: We cannot speak of this now, since it depends on how the elections will be conducted in the future. There are elections monitoring in every country. Of course, with less number of observers where the risks are smaller, while here we have the bad experience from 2008. There are improvements this year, it is much better, and thus we will wait to see how the next elections will be conducted.

Q: Do you perceive as indicative the fact that four hours before the closure of ballot boxes, the turnout of presidential elections was very low, while the percentage was increased in the last hours?

Herrero: I cannot comment anything in this direction, but I can only say that the threshold was reached. I do not see anything indicative in terms when it was voted since there was no mistake reported in this direction. The ODIHR Election Observation Mission is reviewing the issue of 40 percent threshold, with possibly reducing it to 30 or 15 percent, or perhaps removing it totally.

Q: Considering the multiethnic concept of the country wouldn’t be more logical to increase the threshold to let’s say 50 percent, in order to make the Macedonian presidential candidate offer election platforms suitable for the Albanians as well?

Herrero: I do not think so. I agree with you that the presidential candidate should attract the Albanian electorate considering country's multiethnic character, but this can be reached without the threshold requirement. Its increase risks to raise ethnic tensions. Perhaps the political parties need to come up with a joint candidate.

Q: Official information from SEC says that the turnout in Albanian populated areas was very symbolical for the presidential elections. Do you expect this to have a political impact in the president's legitimacy?

Herrero: It should not, because based on the Constitution provisions, the state president has obligations beyond political and ethnic interests.

Q: You mentioned that there were threats reported in these elections as well. Who did they come from, and what takes the state to do in order to eliminate this phenomenon?

Herrero: The observers received information for threats by ordinary citizens, and that information is with sufficient credibility.

Q: Certain ambassadors, who contributed to the appeasement of the pre-election atmosphere, claimed there was a political pressure exerted on the administration servants. Does OSCE have information on this?

Herrero: We have information for such pressures, as well as for threats and other irregularities. But, comparing to previous elections, they were lesser and this should be commended.

Q: Is this an indication of lack of institutional democracy?

Herrero: Yes. More efforts to consolidate the democratic process in the country should take place, but I believe we are in the right path.

Q: The equitable representation of Albanians in the public administration, as required by Ohrid Agreement and OSCE Mission's mandate, remains a problem in Macedonia. What is your comment on this?

Herrero: We try to help in this direction and will follow this issue along with the government and other institutions at central and local level in order to implement the 'spirit' of Ohrid Agreement and its provisions.

Q: Is there a deadline until when the realization of such provisions will be tolerated since this deadline was exceeded for several times so far?

Herrero: No. We did not set any deadlines since the issue is not that simple. For certain positions are needed qualified people, which are often difficult to find. And then we should be careful they are not hired on party basis, but based on administration's needs.

Q: How do you assess the political security situation in the country?

Herrero: Now the situation seems stable, peaceful and secure. But, we should strive to preserve it as such, since there are still issues in the region that were not completely solved and this could affect the country's stability. So, there should be efforts for harmonization of co-existence between different communities.