



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S INTERVIEW WITH *KLAN TV*
ON ELECTORAL REFORM ISSUES**

31 October 2016

Interviewed by Elja Zotka

Klan TV: Mr. Ambassador, thank you for this interview. The first question I would like to ask you is about the ad hoc parliamentary committee on electoral reform. The committee was established almost a year ago, but has held only few meetings. Do you think that the time left until the June 2017 elections is enough for the committee to include in the electoral law all recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR following the 2013 and 2015 elections?

Ambassador Borchardt: Thank you very much. There are only a few weeks left until the President, based on the law, will decree the date for the next elections and the process of preparation for these elections will start. The bodies in charge of that, the Central Election Commission, local electoral institutions, parties, etc., they will need time to prepare for that, to get acquainted with the system. So far recommendations made by OSCE/ODIHR – and major political parties committed themselves to implement these recommendations – have not yet been implemented. So, we feel a certain time pressure that this is going to happen in order to have for everyone a safe ground for preparing the elections. So, we strongly encourage the ad hoc committee to work on these matters as quickly as possible.

Klan TV: Mr. Ambassador, you are saying that the clock is ticking and there is not much time left to reflect the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations on elections in Albania in the electoral law. Do you think that there is still time for a change of the electoral system? I am asking this because ahead of every elections the parties speak about the need to change or correct it.

Ambassador Borchardt: This is a question of timing and of the intensity of the changes. The OSCE/ODIHR are not suggesting specific electoral systems. I am German and in Germany we have for national elections, regional elections and local elections probably 50 different systems – at least 20. And all of them are legitimate and are adapted to the regional traditions. So we, OSCE/ODIHR fully respect the choice of individual countries to choose the electoral system which is most apt for the country, for its traditions and for its specific political situation. What we are doing is, on the one hand, we give advice on how to make technically a system fit in a specific situation; and then, of course, we ask, we recommend, that things are speeded up, that things happen quickly, because the electoral bodies, parties, etc. have to get acquainted to the system.

Klan TV: All right, you recommend, but will open candidate list be part of such recommendations? The small parties are asking for open lists. Do you think this would improve the quality of parliament members? All these years we have heard often about the decriminalization issue, and the participation of incriminated people in parliament. Would open lists be a solution to this issue?

Ambassador Borchardt: To decide that is a full prerogative of the Albanian parliament, and as it, to a large extent may affect constitutional questions, this would also mean that needs a broad majority, so that consensus has to be found. There are arguments in favour of open lists, there are arguments against open lists, and there should be careful consideration given to all these arguments before a decision is taken. We, OSCE/ODIHR do not say do this or do that. We are available to explain the potential consequences and the technical traps which are linked with different models.

Klan TV: Well, I understand what you are saying, but my question again is, in your opinion, do you think this would help us have a better quality in the Parliament?

Ambassador Borchardt: I cannot really give you a perspective in that. The quality of Parliament would, inter alia, depend on the lists that would be put up by the parties, and this is a prerogative of the parties to set up these lists, and then if the voter can choose between the different candidates on the list is up to the voter to choose individual candidates.

Klan TV: And one more question about the proposal coming from the Democratic Party. Mr. Basha proposes that the electoral campaigns of the political parties must be 100% financed by the state, because, according to him, this would avoid all kinds of suspicious financing, which could later turn into a problem of corruption, and abuse of power. Do you think that this could be a solution in your opinion? Would the 100% state financing of the party electoral campaigns be a solution?

Ambassador Borchardt: Let me first of all praise politicians, who start publicly discussing about electoral financing. I have seen in previous elections when I was here as the German Ambassador that the published figures and the wits of the electoral campaigns didn't really fit very well together. So, it is good that this is in the public domain, and that this is discussed. On the other hand, a regulation of the political party financing is a central part of electoral and party regulations. Parties need quite a lot of money not only for electoral campaigns, but also for their day-to-day work and the transmission of their initiatives and ideas to the electorate also outside of electoral process. That costs money. You can do that with only state funding, but it needs quite a lot of money. Is so much money available? I do not know. You can also allow private financing as well. That is done in a lot of countries. What is our main issue is the transparency of the funding, so that it becomes very clearly visible who is giving what kind of amount, so that a voter can judge this party is supported by X, Y, and Z, and X and Y I don't like, so I vote for someone else. This is for us the real issue...and there, in the Electoral Law some major amendments could be done, so that even prior to the elections parties are obliged to give more detailed information about where the money comes from. And also, the Electoral Commission, the Central Election Commission, can make a contribution by publishing reference prices, what does a poster cost, what does a rally cost, what does a party electoral office cost in average. Then, the citizen and NGOs can get an idea of how much an electoral campaign really costs, and could question, and then put that into consideration at the polling booth and making their cross here, there, or there. And also, another aspect in that context could be more power and more strength of the Central Election Commission, then it has a stronger role in supervising the transparency of electoral campaign financing, then also more personnel to do that. This would contribute and this is what we suggest.

Klan TV: And my last question. As you mentioned earlier, you have been the German Ambassador in our country, and you return as the Head of the OSCE Presence, so you are

familiar with the Albanian politics, the mentality of our politicians, and with our situation. Do you think Albania could hold elections that meet the standards? Could the 2017 elections get a good evaluation by the OSCE/ODIHR?

Ambassador Borchardt: Elections have got better over the years. That is important, and so we will do our best to make a contribution that even the next elections get better again.