

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S INTERVIEW ON BUGAJSKI'S HOUR

Given on 17 May, broadcast on 18 May 2013

Bugajski: “It is time for the *Bugajski Hot Seat* and our guest today is Eugen Wollfarth, the head of the OSCE Mission in Tirana in Albania. Thank you for joining us. Welcome to the show.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Thanks for the invitation. I am happy to be here.”

Bugajski: “A little background on our guest for our viewers. He has worked for over 25 years – correct me if I am wrong – in the German Foreign Office and has wide experience in the Western Balkans, including as Head of the German Liaison Office in Pristina and Division head in the European Department in Berlin. He came to Tirana as Head of the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, in September 2010. Again, welcome to the show. Let’s jump straight into the questions. Let me begin with a general question for those of our viewers who may not quite understand what sort of a creature the OSCE is. I have been working on and off with the OSCE for over 20 years, and I have seen it develop, particularly its election monitoring side. Can you sort of summarize exactly what the OSCE is, what the OSCE does and why it is important?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The OSCE started as a conference. It is now an organization. As a conference, it helped to find channels of dialogue between the East and the West to provide peace, to come closer to each other and also to live up with standards and later with commitments to see to peaceful developments, including liberty, democracy and the sound economic development. All these developed over time and the OSCE Presence here in Albania was established in difficult times for Albania, on the invitation of the government in 1997, helping – and this is our mandate – Albania to live up to these commitments. Because Albania wanted and still wants to develop, to move on, to stabilize democracy and have a better life. That is what we are standing for and we are helping Albanians, by the way with a large number of Albanians - 75% of my staff is national staff.”

Bugajski: “How big is the staff here, by the way?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Right now we are 85 persons. We used to be more, but we made some progress. Also, we have become over the years more efficient and we are asked to be efficient. It is a fine staff and it is wonderful to work with them, especially here in Albania. It is a rewarding country.”

Bugajski: “As a component of the OSCE again, maybe you could explain to our viewers something about the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR. It is ODIHR that actually monitors the elections, that gathers the teams, sends election monitors to different countries, even though it is a component of the OSCE. But I have a very specific question. Those comments I saw from the new head of the ODIHR observation here in Albania, Conny McCormack, who stated that the ODIHR does not really assess elections or does not legitimize elections. But surely by being here, by giving a statement about the elections, ODIHR does actually contribute internationally, but also

domestically to either legitimize or delegitimize elections. It is more than recommendations. It is an important stamp of approval or stamp of disapproval. Would you agree?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “An ODIHR mission costs money. It is serious business, because it comes from the states who contribute to the OSCE and that includes Albania. The international community assembled in the OSCE cares. They care about Albania, therefore they invest. What ODIHR does, by the way what the OSCE is doing also, we have mandates. The ODIHR mission has a mandate to observe elections and also come throughout the process in the end to recommendations. We at the OSCE Presence work with national Albanian counterparts all the time, help to see to electoral reform. Last year there was such a big event. This was based on recommendations ODIHR came up with after the last general and also last local elections. Therefore, these recommendations are extremely good bases for making progress and base it on the observed events and facts here in the country. They highlighted several times now already that political will is needed and this on the Albanian side, starting with the parties, but also the whole state system. This points to something extremely important. We, from OSCE and ODIHR – as an OSCE independent institution – we help Albanians to come to a fully legitimate system. It is Albanian ownership we need to see, where we assist and help. ODIHR in this is having a great stabilizing effect.”

Bugajski: “The point I am trying to make is that the OSCE statement, the statement soon after the elections, then the final report that is issued several weeks after, has an important impact. Lot of analysts and policymakers I know in Washington read this and assess the progress of any country in terms of its democratization process, in terms of its election progress and so forth. So, I am trying to stress the importance of the OSCE in terms of not just the image of the country, but the progress of that country, how it is perceived internationally. Would you agree with that?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes. I would use the picture of a catalytic converter. The Albanian institutions and parties and citizens want democracy. They have a democratic event, which is elections. This is one of the core moments in democracy and they get assistance. The presence of internationals experienced in elections also keeps an eye and helps the persons and the entities involved to stay disciplined, to stick to their own rules, because all elections here are based on the Albanian Constitution, on the Albanian Electoral Code and the other relevant laws, including the Criminal Code seeing to certain punishments if certain deeds are being done. So, this is just helping the Albanian system to come to better performance, which is normal, by the way, in still relatively young democracies and progress has been achieved over the last years.”

Bugajski: “Let’s turn specifically now into some detail about the upcoming parliamentary elections in Albania. How important are they for Albania’s progress, not just in terms of its elections performance, but the democratization process as a whole. In your estimation – you know the region extremely well – is Albania moving forward, backward or is it stationary in terms of its election performance?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It is slowly moving forward. I wish for a higher speed. It has to do with the political will in being more technical where technicality is needed. A ballot sheet is square, there are parties on it, crossing it and not making too much noise about it, casting it in the box. But here you have details that are astonishing, because when you pass straight forward and do not want to come in through the back door you use simple paper. Here is banknote style. You do not need stamps on the back side – here you have stamps on the back

side. And so on and so forth. You see a complicated system and the more complicated a system is, the more error margin you have. I have tried to convey several times: keep it simple, stay straight, let the voters vote. What should be the outcome is in the hand of the voters, but what the system should provide is a photograph of what Albanian voters want on Election Day and not distorted, not put a filter on a certain colour or distort it the other way with a magnifier or zoom. It is the full picture of all that go to the polls and a fair picture.”

Bugajski: “The motto has always been, or the measure has always been – and I used to be on OSCE missions particularly in former Yugoslavia and other parts of Eastern Europe: were the elections free and fair? That is the first question, the big question that one is asked. Of course, it depends how you define free and fair and sometimes we used to say that they were fairly free but not freely fair. In terms of Albania’s progress up to now, we have not had elections that had a clean, let’s say, bill of health. In other words, up until now you couldn’t say that they were fully free and fully fair. What makes you think that these elections are going to be any different to the past?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “For me and many others I think the most important thing is one of the core elements: free, having free elections is not disputed. This is fundamental. On the fairness side, this is much more complex and I would also start with the system. Do you see it, when you are a small party, as a fair system, where you have a system that is more advantageous to the big parties? Just to name one complicated issue. There is not a fully clear answer to it, because democracy allows for a large variety of approaches: majority system, like in England or a very balanced one countries like Germany have, where it is also complicated, because the balancing leads to calculations and the ordinary citizen does not understand anymore and involves a Constitutional Court. So, there are many approaches and the important thing is all have to go through the same system, which is considered legal in the country. Albania has the system it has, so it has to respect it and live with it. If they see – I am talking about the Albanian parties as a whole – that it needs development, they should do it to the benefit of the citizens, because what should come out in the end is a government that is able to see to progress of the country, to be able also to include the opposition, because as things stand in Albania for all the core parts of the reform process a 60% majority is needed. So far, no camp, no political camp was ever able to provide 60% from one side only. So, coming together to play Team Albania at the same time is very important while of course competing, because that is what political parties are voted for: having the better ideas, having the better programme, being more convincing to the citizens, so that they have the impression and are convinced on the election day that they vote the better option for the future. You asked what the elections mean for Albania. They are really important. They are decisive for the future and very important supranational entities like the European Union have made it clear what that means for the future integration of Albania.”

Bugajski: “In terms of Albania’s progress towards candidate status and so forth...”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yeah.”

Bugajski: “So these are the key elections, these are landmark elections, historical elections...”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “These are landmark elections, yeah.”

Bugajski: “Let me ask you, do you fear any potential fraud or manipulation, or something else that could disqualify the vote? I hear this from some people. I know that in several countries there had been suspicions that some elements of the vote has been distorted, the vote count has not been properly done. Do you fear anything like that here in these elections?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “As things have developed, no. There is participation through commissioners in the regions, also in the counting centres, including commissioners from, may I say, all political camps, which see to mutual control. This is very important in being correct in the counting. The counting in the past was correct. A small margin of error is always possible and permitted. That happens also in very mature democracies. But here the system is proof enough to see to good counting. When the commissioners stick to the rules, also including mutual control at the counting centre, then I do not see a risk. It is good to have double control. I welcome with many others that there are additional provisions to even include the public. With cameras you can see elements on screen, the ballot sheet shown on the green – this all helps to build public trust that correct counting is being done. Again, it needs contribution from all sides.”

Bugajski: “Will there be a parallel vote count?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “You mean the public doing their own calculations?”

Bugajski: “In other words, NGOs have access to the list of votes after the voting to be able to check that the official figures that go to the next level are correct.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “To my impression that might be similar to the last local elections, which I experienced here in the country. There was something like that. They watched so closely they were in a position indeed to do something which looked like – it does not sound nice – a parallel count. But for double-checking and following and-”

Bugajski: “It instils confidence among citizens.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yeah, also sending the message through it that is closely watched. This is like police in the street. You have the tendency of less traffic light infractions when there is a policeman. That helps to stick even better to the rules. Observing the rules, the rule of law, this of course also for elections and beginning with elections is a key element.”

Bugajski: “We will come in a second, I want to ask you more specific questions, including about the Central Election Commission, which is obviously the big question now. But maybe you could give us some sort of an overview of what kind of expertise and advice has your mission given to different election institutions here. Because I think that one of the OSCE roles is to try and impart the experience that the OSCE has had over the past 20-30 years, particularity with election monitoring, to help a smooth, effective, legitimate election process to take place. What kind of advice has the OSCE given to different institutions here in Albania?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The key moment or the key time was convincing the relevant political parties to come together and be open to start negotiations and discussions in preparing electoral code reform. That, as you know, took a very long time. There was a first attempt in October 2010, but it took then more than a year coming together then finally,

including on the level of MPs, expert level. We from the OSCE Presence team provided advice, including and based on the recommendations of the ODIHR after the 2009 and 2011 elections. When these items were discussed between the Albanian interlocutors we also had some items that are not fully reflected, like the gender issue, the position of women in this framework was improved, but not as much as we would have wished for. One of the results you can also see: there were some punishments from the CEC towards political parties not fulfilling the 30% quota for women and in one case even for men, because it works both ways around. It came also then to elements where we had additional experts present from ODIHR for electronic components – one of the innovations in the Electoral Code reform for electronic counting, which will be tested in a pilot, or is intended at least, in the Fier area; and the electronic ID cards readers for the identification of voters here in Tirana.”

Bugajski: “And in terms of involvement of other organizations, how important is the role of NGOs, of local Albanian NGOs in the election process, in terms of monitoring, in terms of bringing out the vote and so forth?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “We very much welcome, together with other partners, that Albanian non-governmental organizations are also active. Because it is Albania and it could not be better than having Albanians engaged in their own democratic development. That is the best you can get. I highly welcome that. I was also very pleased, by the way, when these observers were received, after the elections, by the President of the Republic – a very important, a very good signal, a very encouraging signal that up to the highest institutions their work is recognized. I am happy when we are just an add-on to help Albanians to provide that. This is probably as good as it can get. I really welcome that.”

Bugajski: “Would you say that there is more involvement now than there were in previous elections, local and general?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Slowly but surely NGOs get more active and also more constructive, because this is also an important element. While criticizing is very important – you have positive and negative criticism – but coming up also with proposals how to solve a question, a challenge, a problem, this is very important and NGOs can do that as well.”

Bugajski: “Let me ask you now very specifically. There have been reports by OSCE, by other bodies that have expressed a series of concerns about the election process. Let me ask you a few specifics. For example, this question about the polarized political environment, which is something the EU has stressed as being a major negative impact on the democratization, on the functioning of parliament. Would it have a negative impact on the elections?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The rough language used by key political players, at least by many of them, including the chairs of the big parties, is not helpful to send a comforting image that they are able to come together. I remind you, 60% is needed also after election day to go ahead with the reform process. We are here to help to see to that reform process. What to do with the reform process? According to the declarations from all key players here, this country, Albania, wants to integrate into the European structures, which includes the European Union. Therefore these reform steps are needed. How are you increasing the probability of reaching a 60% majority – by smashing all the time your political counterpart and distributing black eyes? Probably not. Most likely not. This is not building the constructive environment we want to see. The country has to come together, the political

parties at high level and the big parties have to come together and compete civilized, compete with good ideas, compete with good programmes, compete with convincing conduct and the wrong level of words is not impressing anybody. It is shying people off and it is not helping for trust. It also sends a very negative image to the outside world, because while these elections are going on also the waves, in some cases the shockwaves, reach outside people – some of them may be interested investors. And when they see the turmoil, then they probably see to something else. Therefore I would repeat something, which should be very clear: Albania with the end of the dictatorship is not alone on the planet. They want to integrate so therefore they should also consider what image is created through action – good behaviour or bad behavior - outside.”

Bugajski: “Presumably, you’d agree that it would be useful to have a debate at the highest level between the leaders of the two major parties in a civilized fashion. I have invited them on my show here, but I do not think they want to sit together at the moment to talk. This is what we do in America. However much mudslinging there is, there comes a time when you need to show the voter what you stand for and how your opponent differs from you in terms of policy. Do you think something like that would be useful here?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Absolutely. I think extending that invitation was an important thing you could do. I am not too surprised, but I share probably your limited happiness that they did not say ‘yes’, because it would be a good opportunity also to show where are the differences and also – and this is the most important point at this stage – to show a willingness to move forward, to come together on points that matter for the future of Albania.”

Bugajski: “And the willingness to co-operate after the elections, in order to pass important legislation and move the reform process forward. That is absolutely key. Let me ask you a question: has there been according to your knowledge, information you have, any pressure on voters, any misuse of government funds during this campaign? Pressure on voters of buying voters – anything like this has been reported?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “There are complaints. We look into them when it comes to using public funds for campaigning in an undue manner. We heard reports and claims on the national and also on the local level, and help to see that this is limited, if not abolished. That is part of the observation. That is clearly against the Albanian legislation to use public means for campaigning and should be also observed by all that are campaigning.”

Bugajski: “Right. It is very difficult during the election, I know, for the incumbent government to distinguish when they appear on television between what the reporting about the government and what the reporting about the party. That is always a sort of fuzzy area”.

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yeah. ODIHR, of course, since they arrived earlier this week, they will also look into that part and I am pretty convinced that it will be an element in their report.”

Bugajski: “Right. Let’s go into one of the burning questions. In Washington we hear about this all the time, those of us that follow Albania closely – that is the Central Election Commission and the problems there. As we know it does not have the required mandated seven members at the moment. First of all, would you say that the procedures were lawful for the replacement of the CEC members?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “There was only one replacement. That was on the government side. That was the ousting of one member in a manner that still needs further analysis, on not so clear legal grounds. But I leave that first of all to the Albanian side to solve it. It created some waves that led on the other side to some resignations. That came also in different steps, for different reasons and maybe also different backgrounds. What is left behind is a rump Central Election Commission with four members only out of seven. For the technical decisions and according to the legislation, they are operable, but legality is only one point. It is very important to have a maximum of credibility and this of course is limited when you have no opposition-nominated members present.”

Bugajski: “That was my next question. How credible now is the Election Commission? Has it lost its credibility, its legitimacy?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It is not as strong and cannot be as convincing as before. The remaining three, plus the one new member, do the utmost of continuing the technical preparations. That includes a recent testing internally of the ID card readers very recently – all these steps that are necessary to follow the Code and prepare for these elections. Which is very important: it is a big service much needed for the country. I feel pity for the remaining ones, starting with the Chair Ms. Lleshi that it looks like they are criticized so much and still they have to work with a lot of energy to achieve the preparations for these elections. While I am reluctant to go into details which led to the removal of Mr. Muho of the SMI, but it was a surprise move that still needs explanation where the legal basis for that was. That did not come. So there, there is a legitimacy question mark. But there is another one based on something else: the political will that was also incited after the elections. Where is the political will then for the other side? Are we in a tit for tat scenario or is the SP, let me spell it out, or is the SMI now outside the law and the obligations and the privileges the parties have only because another questionable step took place? Does it mean that from the other side you have to be destructive and not do the maximum being constructive to add to legitimacy? I leave that in the hand of the political leaders. I again invite them strongly to live up to the commitments. They say they are committed to the interests of the Albanian people, so they should fill up and when they are discontent with certain elements of the decisions or certain procedures they can voice it. Even in Albania is possible to voice it in a way without using inappropriate language. The citizens, I can assure you from the feedback we get, would welcome this, because they want to have elections, they want to build trust in the system and this is better done when you have all relevant political camps actively represented in key institutions as the Central Election Commission is when preparing for general elections. These are shortcomings I could not speak up intensively and loud enough. I really do not understand why this tactic was chosen as a good option. It is not a good option.”

Bugajski: “You mean removing the three members or both you mean, the replacement and the removal...?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Leaving a gap for such an extended time so close to elections.”

Bugajski: “Do you think as the opposition says that the whole Central Election Commission needs to be recomposed, in other words there is a need to start from the beginning?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “It would need further explanation why doing that so short before the elections. By the way, Mrs. Lleshi and also Mr. Biba, who resigned, did a very big effort,

a very good job. They worked beautifully together, assisted by the team. So much, if not all of what we see, could have been avoided.”

Bugajski: “So you would blame both sides in this problem with the CEC?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes, absolutely. Both sides with shortcomings, with actions not in the interest of the people, for very different reasons, for very different legal grounds, but in the result it is the same: doing damage to a body that should be technical and fully operative before general elections.”

Bugajski: “Do you think that with international pressure and the realization that the elections could be somehow delegitimized that this would put pressure on both sides so that they come together and resolve this problem with the Central Election Commission?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Advice yes, but pressure... This is a free country. This is a sovereign country that can decide on the speed of its reform, which has an effect on the speed of the European integration process. So, therefore why pressing the Albanians? If they don’t want to move, ok. It is an Albanian decision. Liberty is a tricky thing. I am a fan of freedom, liberty – no matter whether you use the Germanic or the Latin word. It is very important and it includes also the liberty for failure and making errors.”

Bugajski: “And the liberty to do nothing.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “But if that is in the interest of the Albanian people now with the 23 June elections the voters have a possibility to give an answer to that.”

Bugajski: “Let me ask you a couple of other questions about potential problems. The campaign has officially started now and, of course, is covered very much in the media. Would you say the media environment is very polarized and tends to favour specific political interests? Not this channel, of course, but...”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “They cover it and sometimes you can see from which camps they come background-wise. I wished for some more separation between facts and opinions. Both make up a good media, but especially also good newspapers. I personally would wish with quite some others for more analysis of the programmatic work ahead: what to do in the social camp, on education, there is a lot of discussion also on how to provide infrastructure. All these are very important issues, but do not get enough focus in this upbeat atmosphere, where very often too much of rough language is exchanged. It should be more on the concrete things, what helps Albania to build an even better future. It has made good progress, but more needs to come, more jobs need to be created, it needs to be defined how that can happen in this competitive environment. It is quite competitive in Europe. You cannot even talk about niches. Almost everything seems to be complete, so you really have to be good in performing and find your niche. That is done also through good party programmes that help to see to rule of law, to have a better judicial system, all these things. These are the real issue, not to talk about corruption even – one of the evils that clearly need to be diminished here – or trafficking, all sorts of trafficking. These are tough issues, of course, but they need to be handled and convincingly handled in the future.”

Bugajski: “One of the problems of many years since I have been coming to Albania has been this voter registration lists, whether they are complete, whether people are missing, and I

have had complaints from both sides, whoever loses, that there is something wrong with the voter lists. How do they stand now? Are there any major irregularities?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “There seem to be no major irregularities at these times, but I can understand bringing up that question. We also see that as a work in progress, because the Electoral Code allows people, Albanians that live outside, to vote, and they still appear in most cases in the places where they lived before and many of them with unknown residency. This, of course, while being legally required, also creates question marks on what that means. Not all of them, only a small number will be able to travel to Albania on the Election Day – so that leads also that figures of participation remain lower than they could be.”

Bugajski: “That is to me as a tragedy that so many Albanians living outside the country – how many of them can afford or have the time simply in order to vote?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Indeed.”

Bugajski: “It is a problem. It is something that should have been looked into and helped. Is the OSCE playing a role in this to try and enable Albanian missions overseas to have voters coming, whether in Athens, or Washington, or Berlin?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “If we would be invited to provide advice in this field, yes. But this is also a budget issue. While it might seem desirable, Albania has done very good and tremendous efforts, and it also costs money to install embassies abroad, but this is not a huge country. This is a beautiful, but still relatively small country with a not too big state budget. One must be able to afford all these expenses and the infrastructure out there, in the traditional form, like for a big state, are not yet there. Perhaps through co-operation with some regional countries, that might be doable in the future, but for the time being I see good reasons why it has not developed further.”

Bugajski: “Something that needs to be actively looked out more...”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes. Affordability is also an issue.”

Bugajski: “Although in these days with digital voting and so forth and computerization, presumably it would not be as expensive as physically coming to the voting booth, as in the old days.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Maybe. Democracy allows for so many options. If I may add on a personal basis, in that respect, I am still very traditional: I like to go to the voting centre and cast my vote and make a cross on a piece of paper. I like that. It is an experience. We push so many buttons on a computer that...”

Bugajski: “And we still read books rather than on *Kindle*.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes. And I am not even afraid to say that. I like the sound, sometimes even from an old book, the smell... This is so real life.”

Bugajski: “Yes, exactly. Let me ask you a question. In terms of specifics, we have gone through some of these, but some members of the opposition I have heard have charged that the mission somehow is too soft on the government. In other words, that there is not enough

criticism of the government role, not just in the election process, but in the democratization process. Is there any political bias in the OSCE mission?"

Ambassador Wollfarth: "We are here to help Albanian institutions, and that includes the parliament, the government, the judicial system, the police – all these institutions – to provide advice. So, they are also our first addressee and that is in our mandate. We are not an instrument of anybody wherever in the political spectrum. Some perceptions – I know that, we hear that, we read it, we see it – are a different one, but this is not the case. Sometimes, we get criticism from both sides, in election time even very often, when we remind to stay on the track of the law, the Albanian law, because it might be uncomfortable for the tactical move in a given moment. So, when we remind that, we get attacked from both sides."

Bugajski: "So, because Albania is a member of the OSCE, the government does not try to influence you in a particular way when giving you the mandate to operate in the country? I do not just mean in Albania, but everywhere."

Ambassador Wollfarth: "We have very good relations with the government. The nominal focal point is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We traditionally have excellent co-operation with them. It is open-minded. They do not interfere. I find that fantastic, because not all the advice we give is a comfortable advice. We are also criticizing. This is known. As a host country to the OSCE, Albania is really fantastic and we try to pay back also to help to use the enormous potential Albania has. There are good people here. There needs to be more focus on being constructive and stabilizing democratic institutions."

Bugajski: "In a broader picture now, looking sort of beyond the elections, you have mentioned this a little bit. Do you agree, as some observers have noted, that Albania is maybe witnessing a weakening of state institutions, the rule of law not properly applied? Is there a democratic regress or progress looking at it in a much broader picture? Some might have even said there is creeping authoritarianism in Albania. How would you respond to this?"

Ambassador Wollfarth: "A very important element of your list of questions is certainly having a really professional civil service, based on merits. All the actions, including the draft laws on that need not only to be adopted, but also brought to full life. While saying this, I also would like to remind that while the professionalism of many of the existing is there, it can be better used by filling up the lines that are not with the optimum people, with professional people. In the end, then, always look at the state budget. Keep looking. It is being done right now, but looking at the state budget, what Albania can afford, and staying lean and mean with very good professional people. That would help enormously. But there are already quite a lot of very good people, very good civil servants existing, so I would invite also the citizens not to underestimate these elements. I see potential of big progress in that part."

Bugajski: "And a civil service presumably based on merit, not as we used to call it the "spoil system", where whoever wins gives all the positions to their people."

Ambassador Wollfarth: "Sometimes there seems also to be the tradition when there is a change that far too many people leave. This is a loss of experience, if not expertise. It is very important to build up that experience. Albania as a country is old. It is long-standing traditions, it is a vibrant, it is a beautiful and it is sympathetic country – I really like it. But 20 years of democracy, with all these changes you see in the administration, at many levels where it is not necessary, also lead to the fact that not enough experience is accumulated to

really perform fully and take the profit from that experience in good service for the citizens.”

Bugajski: “Sure. I hear a lot of frustration particularly from young people who are often told: “Well, look at where Albania was 20 years ago; look at the progress that we have already made.” But that is not good enough for somebody who sees how the rest of Europe operates, or America operates. They are impatient. What would be your message to these, to new voters, young people?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “One should not stand still here in Albania, because also the region is moving. When you see integration processes: Croatia will join the European Union on 1 July, so a couple of weeks from now; Montenegro is moving ahead; Serbia is moving ahead; others are also moving ahead. Why should Albania stay behind? It is also competing. Albania should be first of all attractive to as many Albanians as possible. And that comes with the rule of law, the quality of life here, the number of jobs, all these complicated things. They are not easy tasks. I am under no illusion and no serious politician here is under any illusions. And the people should know that some patience is needed, but also some steps could be taken now.”

Bugajski: “And sometimes impatience is a positive...”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The constructive impatience is a driving force.

Bugajski: “Exactly.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “And also, by the way, mind you, something which usually has a negative image: also envy has also a constructive part, when you use it in the American way. The neighbour has a nice car - you also want to have a nice car and work for it.”

Bugajski: “You don’t want to destroy the neighbour’s car but you want to...”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Exactly, exactly!!! That traditional...”

Bugajski: “I have heard anywhere in the Balkans there is a sort of egalitarian destructive tradition: if you have something and I don’t have it, then I should try and destroy it rather than the opposite, which is competing to get the same or even better.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Absolutely, Janusz! This is being constructive. This is important.”

Bugajski: “But let me ask you a little bit of a controversial question. As you said, there have been some shortcomings in Albania’s democratization process. And the OSCE has been here for about 20 years. Does the OSCE take any responsibility for the fact that Albania has not moved faster in its democratization process? Maybe it is not controversial at all.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Maybe we were not, over the years, not forceful enough. But then again it is a voluntary principle. We are not here with whips. This is helping. It is an assistance. The core action and the responsibility at all times is laying with the Albanian institutions: the government, the parliament, and all the other institutions. So it is of help. We are not running the show. None of the internationals is here to run it. To use a picture, an old picture from the neighbourhood: this is not to be confused with UNMIK or something like that. We are in an assisting role and we are invited for this assisting role and we have the

mandate. That is why I have the privilege also to voice my advice and my concerns with one single goal: in helping Albania to move forward, but not directly through the system; in helping to stabilize and make the system even more rule of law based and see to better functionality of democratic intuitions, starting with parliament, to name just a few key issues.”

Bugajski: “There is a sort of tension or contraction between having a long-term OSCE Presence and the fact that Albania is an independent country, it is already in NATO, is moving towards the EU. Do you think the Presence should continue somehow? Because it is seen, whatever you say, as a sort of supervisory mission, which of course it really isn’t. It is not like UNMIK, it is not like the NATO mission in Kosova and so forth. How do you move forward now with the OSCE Presence here, beyond these elections? Do you think it should continue? For how long? What should be the mandate?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The OSCE Presence in Albania should continue. Our mandate includes, I do not want to repeat it too much, democratization, strengthening of the institutions, the human rights – by the way there is a relatively good track record, so this is not as problematic anymore; big achievements have been made. It is always rule of law, rule of law, in all different aspect. I would say, and this is shared also by many participating States, as the members of the OSCE are called, that we are about half way in our mandate. We started in 1997, 15-16 years ago. That does not mean that we would stay another 16 years for symmetry. It depends on how quick the country moves forwards. But, in achievements, I would say mission half accomplished so far, so there is enough reasons to continue.”

Bugajski: “How does it compare with neighbouring countries, in terms of OSCE missions? Where do you have missions in the Balkans, in other words, where else?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “We have missions in Skopje, in Montenegro, in Kosovo, in Serbia, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, of course, here in Albania. We had one in Zagreb, in Croatia, but for obvious reasons, now joining the European Union, it was closed when the decision was taken with the accession date. As a stimulation for the citizens – as soon as we come close to joining, then there is no need anymore. But in the case of Albania much still needs to be done.”

Bugajski: “Which means the path towards the EU is still going to be prolonged. It is not going to be a 2-3 year exercise. It is going to be presumably much longer, in the steps towards the entry, to get as far as Croatia...”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Experience with other accession processes tells that this is a several-year process.”

Bugajski: “There is another question here, which, and I am not just talking about the OSCE, but I have noticed this over the past 20 years: Albania emerged from international isolation, but sometimes, one feels it is going the other way, in other words there is too much of a dependency relationship with certain governments, with certain institutions. Would you say that a continued OSCE Presence as well as a strong role of the US embassy, the EU embassy, the German embassy and others, creates this sort of potentially unhealthy dependency relationship, where Albanians are always looking to outsiders to resolve their problems, rather than to their own politicians and institutions?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “There could be indeed more dialogue between the key political forces and, as things stand, with the need of 60 % majority for reform steps that includes the leaders of the two big camps. So there it should be the key to the solution, but unfortunately it is always looked for outside players. All of us are internationals outside players and we should not be called as referees all the time or then being often seen as a partisan referee. This is not reasonable, this is not fact-based and it is not leading to a solution. The solution should be looked for in the Albanian camps. Advice can be given from outside. When it comes to additional steps, of course, there you can be sovereign, you can be dependent, but when you want money from international bodies then of course you have to report and that is where some of the sovereignty ends. The sovereign decision is to ask for money from the EBRD, from the IMF, from the World Bank and many others, but then you have to fulfil the conditions and stick to the commitments. That is like freedom. In the end it is not unlimited. Then you have to stick to the rules.”

Bugajski: “There is always rules. And in terms of Albania being a member of the OSCE, and also it participates, Albanians participate in OSCE/ODIHR missions abroad, in other countries, what is the participation of Albanians in the OSCE? How active a partner, a member is Albania?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I can tell from Vienna, they are a very active delegation there. Not only when it is directly related to the Presence in Albania. They are very professional. I can only say good words. I am sure, but this is not my turf directly, that they also provide good advice when it comes to neighbouring missions. Because the OSCE is based on an important – not always easy principle – which is consensus. Consensus of all 57 States. And that includes Albania, the host country.”

Bugajski: “And presumably the experience of Albanians with the democratization process would stand them in good stead when they are monitoring the process of the elections in countries, let’s say, in Central Asia, or some of the other former Soviet republics. In other words, “we have been through that experience, we can impart this to you”. So, Albania itself can play an important role, because of that democratization process, which for example Germany has not gone through in this period, or America hasn’t, whereas Albania has.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes.”

Bugajski: “So to use your experiences and advantage in imparting it to others. Would you agree with that?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes. And they do it – the communication, sharing of experiences. And at given occasions they have also sent election observation members to elections in other countries. This exchange is clearly there, and there is an Albanian contribution.”

Bugajski: “Let me ask you one more question before we conclude. As I said, I have worked with the OSCE in various capacities, or I have tried to help the OSCE in various capacities over the years. And one of the problems one has in terms of the whole democratization process is certain members of the OSCE who complain that the institution is biased towards the West, Western countries. I am talking about Russia and some of its allies, some of its neighbours. In other words, Moscow often complains that the OSCE is biased, it is trying to impose Western standards of democracy, Western models of democracy in very diverse states. How would you respond to this?”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I do not think it is a happy way of describing the situation. Liberty, freedom, of course, are a tricky thing. You have to be educated and able to handle it and also to control it. Democracy and experience in democracy adds to that, and there is a larger number of Western countries that have experience, also the ability to share a long experience, so that might lead to that distorted picture. But the world, including and starting with the European world, has seen some dramatic positive changes over the last two decades, which included Russia, which very long ago was a leading state in the Soviet Union. Now Russians can travel freely, the economy is so much better than in former times. The same is true for many other countries in the region. And they are still themselves. I mean that in a good sense, in the cultural sense. There are many approaches to democracy and every nation also has the right to find its best approach to democracy. So, I would describe that as far too short describing it just as Western democracy. I mean from the German perspective, Poland is east of us. And, is it an Eastern country, is at a Western country? It does not matter. It is a country that has tremendously developed, which is rich in tradition, and now has in everyday more stable democracy, and it is good for us. The same is true here in the neighbourhood. It is good when you have stable neighbours, as Albania, when you have a stable Montenegro, when you have a stable Serbia, when you have a stable Macedonia – or some call it fYRoM – when you have hopefully also a stable Bosnia and Herzegovina, even more one day, and so on, and so forth. The area includes even EU members, Romania... I could continue, like in an onion to enlarge the circle. This is very important, and in that respect many achievements have been done and been made, and Albania is profiting from it. And now it is also time to stabilize even more democracy here, to see even more to full rule of law and take the according steps. That includes the reform process.”

Bugajski: “What you’re saying is ultimately the most stable states are democratic states. The way I see Russia seeing it, is that for them stable states are neighbouring authoritarian states. But presumably that is a short-term solution to stability and public participation.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Yes.”

Bugajski: “Well, ok. Thank you so much. Let me ask you a very large question. On a personal note, you will be leaving Tirana soon, I understand, presumably after the elections, to a new appointment by the German Foreign Ministry. Will you be staying in the region? I mean, your expertise and knowledge of the region I think is very valuable obviously to the German Government but also to the region itself.”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I indeed will move on. It is even a surprise to me, who is used as a diplomat to changing posts, how quick these three years have passed. I will go back into the German service. The region in the very wide sense, yes, but not immediately. It is not in the Western Balkans, as much I can tell. But once I will be in the position to communicate that, you will see what I mean. I am looking forward to it. It will be an interesting assignment.”

Bugajski: “Well, thank you again very much for your time and best wishes in your position wherever it will be! And maybe at some point in the future we will have you back on the show. Thank you so much!”

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Thank you, Janusz, for the invitation. It was a pleasure to talk to you!”

Bugajski: “Thank you!”