

Panorama newspaper, 2 November 2006

INTERVIEW/OSCE Ambassador Pavel Vacek talks to *Panorama* about the situation on the verge of local elections

“Elections, standards do not depend on weather”

Vacek: Common ground, not futile polemics with internationals

By Bledar Hoti

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how do you consider the current political situation in Albania? The European Parliament recently expressed worry about the tensioned political climate in Albania. How would you comment on the political situation in the country?

A: “I am always reticent to make such comments.. I wish that the situation were more conducive to the key reforms with which the Presence is expected to assist.”

Q: It seems that the cause of tension is the approaching of the local elections. This “battle” is expected to start soon, but the majority and the opposition have not yet accomplished what the international factor has been asking for a long time: the implementation of the electoral reform. What is your opinion about this situation?

A: “If I am not wrong, both the majority and opposition parties have committed to pursuing the electoral reform and following the previous international recommendations and it is their shared responsibility to deliver on it.”

Q: A few days ago, the OSCE Presence presented some concrete proposals aimed at unblocking the work at the Committee and finalizing amendments to the Electoral Code. What are these proposals and why did you choose this moment to make them? How do you consider accusations against the OSCE that the recommendations were prepared by DP people and are in breach of the OSCE/ODIHR report?

A: “You are talking about the paper which summed up the minimum parameters of the electoral reform relevant for the local government elections, all based on the previous international recommendations. The paper was informally shared with the co-chairmen of the Assembly ad hoc committee as a means of reminding the ad hoc committee of the issues and thus also supporting their work. Why then? Hasn't the Committee's mandate expired in the meantime? And the accusations? I think the best thing for the accusers is to finally look for common ground with their political counterparts and not to seek futile polemics with the internationals...”

Q: Because of the electoral reform deadlock, the majority is declaring that if the electoral reform is not implemented, the current Electoral Code could be used in the elections. This Code fails to avoid many problems, and especially the so-called Dushk scheme. In your opinion, if the electoral reform really fails, is it possible to enter elections with the current Electoral Code?

A: “That is both legal and political question which would have to be addressed if it really happened... and I don’t want to prejudge such debate. Until then everything should be done to allow the reform to succeed... And regarding the Dushk? Please ask the Albanian politicians and experts if and in what way the Dushk phenomenon is relevant for the next municipal - and I stress: municipal - elections and what safeguards they seek against it...”

Q: The opposition has asked for postponement of elections, which, according to the law, should take place between 20 December and 20 January. The president has declared that he will set a date within this period, unless an agreement between parties is reached. How do you consider the period when the Government wants to have elections taking place: December-January? In your opinion, are the standards guaranteed?

A: “The one month period for the next municipal elections has been known all the time and is provided by the legal framework. Unless the legal framework is changed there is a general obligation to prepare the elections for the date within that window to be decreed by the President. And the standards and their achievement or not – in a way, that has much more to do with the political will to avoid malpractices of the past than with the weather... Which is not to deny the obvious: it is easier to organise it and also to take part in it when you have the temperature of 20 above zero than 2 metres of snow. But hasn’t all this been known all the time?”

Q: The right-wing majority has been governing the country for a year. How do you compare this Government to the Socialist one, especially with regard to fight against corruption? Do you see concrete results or just rhetoric? What is your opinion about the behaviour of the majority towards constitutional institutions such as the Prosecutor’s Office, the High Council of Justice and the President of the Republic? How do you consider the President’s decision not to dismiss the General Prosecutor?

A: “I don’t want to make such comparisons that do not help. Of course, we have worked with previous governments and we are working also with the current Government.. In that work – which is all, meant to support domestic reforms - we have progressed in several areas like property reform, judiciary, promotion of gender equality, but also police co-operation, to name at least some... We try our best to be transparent, we consult on our plans including the budget and I believe it is appreciated. And we are certainly ready to continue that work...”