

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT CONFERENCE
ON ELECTORAL SYSTEMS**

25 September 2019

Good morning!

Dear Mrs. Hajdari, dear Mr. Gjikhuri, dear Mr. Kaso, dear international experts, dear representatives of political parties,

I open this conference with hope and some confidence: the electoral reform process has to continue in Albania, and the OSCE Presence provides a venue for dialogue among all political forces of the country to continue and to complete this crucial process. It is good to see that the part of the opposition which left parliament is in this important dialogue here in the panel, and I hope this is a pledge to be part of a constructive process.

The country needs dialogue and unity, ahead of the Albanian Chairmanship of the OSCE next year. But this is also important from another much closer point of view. Yesterday, the German parliament received a motion, which puts a lot of responsibility on the Albanian parliament and on Albanian parties. It supports the opening of EU negotiations, but demands that the first accession conference can take place only when, inter alia, an electoral reform has been decided, which is in accordance with the OSCE/ODIHR recommendation. It also recommends that this discussion and decision-making take place in an open and inclusive dialogue.

Last year we have seen substantive progress and co-operation in the Ad-Hoc Committee on electoral reform. It was one of the limited number of areas in which all political actors actually co-operated. All this ended late last year. Until then, the contributions of all sides were valuable, I mean constructively offered and technically insightful.

You will discuss today how a new electoral system can contribute to openness, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, and representation. This is what I expect from all parties: to table concrete proposals, to go beyond this commendable return to dialogue and leave behind rhetorical statements, replacing them with actual concrete proposals. Those would be most welcome.

So I hope that this conference today will reignite the process.

Regarding the talk about the change of the electoral system, this is a choice that Albanian parties will have to make. It is for them to decide. Any political party is entitled to open up for discussion this issue. A functional democracy is based on constructive contestation and inclusive participation.

As the title of the conference says, the electoral system in Albania should not deny any political force or should not build too high hurdles for access to the Assembly, while equally not denying Albanian citizens the right to a wide and fair representation of their interests.

We as the OSCE Presence in Albania and our friends from ODIHR can offer expertise to make this important decision. Should Albania change its electoral system or not? This is your decision. We can help by highlighting the benefits and the problems of different electoral systems. But we do not recommend specific systems and we certainly do not impose them.

At the same time, we may not forget the high expectations you are confronted with concerning the changes of the Electoral Code based on the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. These are parallel processes on which you have a responsibility towards your country.

This conference is a good way to start this important discussion.

At the end, I have a plea: please stick to our theme and abstain from general political statements. Use the opportunity today to talk about electoral reform with a focus on electoral system.

Thank you very much for your attention.