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Interview with the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Pavel Vacek

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Klan TV: The OSCE is the organization which will compile a report on the conduct of the 2005 elections. If there will be violations such as in 2001, will these elections still be considered unacceptable?

Ambassador Vacek: For the moment, I would not like to speculate about the outcome of the elections and the way they will be conducted. They will certainly be monitored, and more specifically, it will be the OSCE/ODIHR to monitor and report on the conduct of these elections. What I can safely say is that we have done our best to assist the Albanian political representation and the Albanian administration to create prerequisites for good elections. We will continue to offer assistance to the Albanian authorities in both preparing and conducting the elections. When it comes to their result, this will be completely up to the Albanian political representatives and the Albanian voters. I hope that the result of these elections will be decided by the Albanian voters.

Klan TV: A few days ago, Ambassador Salzmann expressed a concern of the European Commission over some people in Albania closely related to big economic interests and crime running for MPs. Do you share this concern with him?

Ambassador Vacek: We are certainly aware of this concern, because such concerns come from within the Albanian political scene and I believe they are legitimate. What is also legitimate is to address this through the means available to the Albanian politicians, such as the parliamentary committee on monitoring the electoral preparations. And if there is a will to address these issues, there is a way-out. The code of conduct proposed by the President of the Republic is something else that I would like to mention here. What is important is that it is up to the Albanian political parties to deal with it and it is also up to the Albanian voters to make their opinions on how much the Albanian political parties are able to fulfil their commitments in relation to what is contained in the Electoral Code and maybe how the parties may deliver on their commitments taken in the code of conduct. This thing you mentioned is one of the issues that is worth addressing in this code of conduct.

Klan TV: The Socialist Party and the left-wing coalition are preparing to come up with a scheme of co-operation according to which the allied small parties can benefit from the proportional list. Do you think that this scheme can affect voters' free will?

Ambassador Vacek: First of all, we do not know enough of whichever deal may have been considered or proposed. We certainly are interested in such practises and I can say that the ODIHR as the institution dealing with elections will be able to look at such practices more concretely, but, again, the main responsibility and accountability will be with the political parties and the Albanian voters. It is difficult to speak about things that have been commented only in the media. What has to be respected is the Constitution and the Electoral Code. This will also be our approach and the approach of other international institutions interested in the orderly preparations for the conduct of the elections.

Klan TV: Do you think that what we call the Dushk phenomenon might be repeated, i.e. to have a record number of MPs from a small electoral zone?

Ambassador Vacek: What I think is not that important. What is important is that the question should be answered by or posed to those who make such proposals or take them into consideration. As long as I have no concrete information on what has been considered, by whom and how concretely, I honestly cannot say anything.

Klan TV: What do you think about Berisha's proposal that every vote for candidate go automatically to the party he/she represents in a proportional system, a proposal which has been strongly pushed by the opposition?

Ambassador Vacek: Honestly, on this matter, I would not pass any judgement. We read about this, but it is not our purpose to comment on each proposal made and, again, if there is any possibility for discussing this among the political actors and the Albanian political scene, it could be good. What has to be taken into account is the conformity with the recently-amended Electoral Code.

Klan TV: Talking about the Electoral Code, were the negotiations on amending the Code difficult, and who were the most difficult politicians in relation to the negotiations?

Ambassador Vacek: It is a difficult question. It is not up to the facilitators or mediators in a process to reveal details of the talks or to reveal any personal judgement on any concrete person. That would not be ethical from my part. I cannot do that.

Klan TV: Let us look at you Mr. Ambassador from a different angle. Apart from your role as the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, how do you spend your free time here in Albania? What would be a typical day of yours?

Ambassador Vacek: A typical working day? That is quite easy to describe. A free day is limited only to weekends, and yet not all of them. Then, it is about sports. I have some favourite sports that I practice. And if it is about sports, this means going outside Tirana and even outside the country. My favourite sports are skiing and wind-surfing.

Klan TV: Is there anything that amuses you and what are your relations with the Albanians?

Ambassador Vacek: The Albanians are generally friendly people to foreigners and guests in the country, and I have been treated in the same way.

Klan TV: How much do you know about Albania, Albanian cities and do you have any favourite city here?

Ambassador Vacek: First of all, I do not know enough. That is my personal deficit that I have to compensate for. Besides Tirana, which is the place where I work, I also go to Vlora, but this is not to say that that is necessarily the best place in the country. I cannot say that, but I often go there.

Klan TV: The last question, you may or may not answer it. If you would make an assessment on your work, or to what extent you feel fulfilled in your mission here on a one-to-ten scale, what would be the grade you would give?

Ambassador Vacek: A difficult question. For the moment, I do not feel to know enough or all the things to be able to give a grade. Also, it is not one's role here. I am not here to label things or people, or to give grades, we are here to assist.