

**Remarks of Head of OSCE Presence in Albania,
Ambassador Bernd Borchardt,**

**Conference on New Voting Technologies
Tirana, on 13 December 2017**

Dear Members of Parliament,

Dear colleagues, dear Ambassadors, dear friends.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you today to this high-level conference on New Voting Technologies (NVTs) with our long-term partners, representatives of the Albanian Assembly, the co-chairs of the newly established Ad Hoc Committee on Electoral Reform, representatives from parliamentary and non-parliamentary political parties, the Central Election Commission, national and international partners, domestic and international election experts.

Before we get started I would also like to thank the ad hoc committee and its members for pushing us to organize this, and in particular the Council of Europe, and the Swedish Embassy for supporting this.

The Ad Hoc Committee's has just started to work. For us in the OSCE Presence in Albania providing support to electoral reforms is a long tradition and one of the central pillars of our work is pursuing OSCE/ODIHR recommendations' implementation. We are looking forward to assisting the Committee and we strongly encourage them to implement the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and to make this a central aim of the AHC.

This encouragement is not only addressed to the AHC. The last report on the June elections emphasized the need for robust action to address vote buying and abuse of state resources, including through prosecutions. New voting technologies can bring here only limited help. We welcome that the prosecution has opened cases on abuse of state resources and we call on the prosecution to follow as well the known cases on vote buying.

Some OSCE Participating states are using new technologies, while others have stopped using them and have returned to paper-based electoral methods. The German Constitutional Court even forbade them as intransparent. Thus we need a very thorough discussion about the pros and cons of new voting technologies.

OSCE participating States who introduced NVTs did it for its potential: increase in voter turnout, involvement of citizens living abroad, lower election administration costs in the long run, improved counting accuracy. But benefits are only potential and certainly the use of NVTs for elections is complex and expensive. Not to mention that democratic processes are the last we would like to see under cyber-attack. These are risks in using NVT and they should all be taken into account. NVT cannot create trust and are certainly not there to replace trust in an electoral system. But I recommend to have a close look at electronic counting, which would not require enormous financial resources, be offline and thus not so

easily attached by cyber pirates and can contribute to the de-politicization of a part of the election administration.

At today's conference, we are going to have a closer look at the different contexts in which NVTs have been applied. We will discuss public trust in elections as basis for NVTs, the conference will strongly underline, and I repeat, strongly underline, the need for testing them before application through pilot projects and the need for sufficient public information, voter education and electoral staff training.

I believe this is the right time to discuss the potential application of NVTs, because there is still enough time left until the next elections, but decisions should be taken soon. I would like to underline that, it is crucial not to lose the focus from the other ODIHR recommendations from the last and previous elections. Issues concerning vote-buying perceptions, campaign financing, prosecution of election violation cases referred to Police and Prosecutor's Office, and the professional administration of elections, should be priority issues, not only in the work of the AHC.

Albanian authorities need to carefully consider the options to any future implementation of NVTs. For this reason, recommendations and conclusions from this conference will be presented to the Albanian Assembly.

On our side at the OSCE, we stand ready to continue our support for electoral reform processes and to ensure a firm and effective implementation of relevant legislation.

Thank you very much for your attention.