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PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
TO THE INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS
VIENNA

Statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Albania to the
International Organizations in Vienna, Ambassador Spiro Koçi

On the municipal elections held in Albania on 8 May 2011

863rd meeting of the Permanent Council

26 May 2011

Mr. Chairperson,

First, I would like to thank the delegation of Hungary for raising this issue. I can assure you that the statements coming from Brussels and from other countries, partners and friends, are most welcomed in Tirana.

My delegation would also like to thank the OSCE participating States and the ODIHR for their attention devoted to the municipal elections held in Albania on 8 May 2011. We particularly appreciate the clear commitment of the participating States to monitor the electoral process, as demonstrated by the secondment of as many as 315 short-term observers.

We are grateful to the ODIHR-led Election Observation Mission for its professional work, for the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions delivered on 10 May 2011 and for the interim report of 20 May. Though preliminary, the findings and conclusions of these statements were very encouraging.

Progress has been recorded in several key areas, including the accuracy of voter lists, the transparent performance of the Central Election Commission, the adjudication of pre-electoral disputes, the plurality of views offered by the media, etc.

Election day was overall calm, while the counting process proceeded in a generally transparent manner. It is worth noting that the voter turnout was higher compared to previous elections, which speaks of increased confidence in the country's institutions.

It is our belief that improvements highlighted above were conducive to a competitive and transparent electoral process and lay the groundwork for future progress.

We have full confidence that post-electoral disputes will be adjudicated professionally and in a transparent manner, in line with Albania's legislation and the electoral code. We recall with pleasure that this has been the case during the 2009 elections, as concluded by the ODIHR's final report.

We are fully aware of the shortcomings that do exist, especially those pertaining to the high polarization of the campaign, mistrust between political parties, as well as gaps and ambiguities of the current electoral code, which was designed to serve the needs of parliamentary elections. It is essential that these deficiencies are addressed in time for the next elections.

We concur with the ODIHR preliminary statement that the final assessment of these elections can be uttered after the conclusion of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the handling of complaints and appeals.

By way of conclusion Mr. Chairman, I wish to clarify very shortly the delayed announcement of the Aggregate Table of Results and the contentious issue of the counting of the misplaced ballots, cast for the mayor of Tirana, which have been analyzed also in the interim report and in the statement of High representative Ashton and Commissioner Füle.

The slow pace of the whole process was mainly due to the provisions of transparency of the electoral code of Albania stipulating that each ballot needs to be scanned and fed live into the database of the CEC. This practice may sometimes result detrimental to the brevity of the counting process, particularly in cases where the electoral race was very tight.

An additional delaying factor rests with the contentious decision of the CEC - acting in its capacity of the Commission for Election Administration of Tirana - to count the misplaced ballots. According to the CEC, this decision is rooted in the fundamental international standard, also enshrined in the Albanian law, that the ballot is considered valid when the intention of the voter has been clearly and unambiguously expressed. It is also in line with the electoral code of the country which does not consider misplaced ballots as invalid.

Indeed, the final say and the final verdict on this issue rests with the decision of the Electoral Collegue, entitled by the Albanian law to consider the appeals and the complaints of the political parties.

I thank you for your attention.