



## **Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

### **POST - ELECTION STATEMENT**

#### **Albanian Parliamentary Election 26 May 1996**

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) dispatched its representatives to Tirana in late April to observe the preparations for Albania's May 26th Parliamentary Election. Their responsibilities included observing the campaign and facilitating the arrival of short-term observers contributed by the participating States. The ODIHR representatives met with the Central Election Commission, relevant government officials, political party representatives, and non-governmental organisations. However, ODIHR regrets that the level of official co-operation offered to its representatives was of such a limited nature.

Twenty-three teams of observers were deployed by ODIHR throughout the country on election day, representing 11 OSCE participating States. They covered a representative sample of both urban and rural areas. In total they visited approximately 300 polling stations.

The observers recognise the difficulty inherent in democratic transition, and the distinct progress that Albania has made in overcoming its recent legacy of non-democratic rule. It is a privilege for observers to support such an election process, and they have undertaken their duties with a strong commitment to objectivity and impartiality.

While the ODIHR was encouraged by many positive aspects of the election law guaranteeing multi-party election commissions and open access to the election process by international and domestic observers, the observers noted with regret that in many instances the implementation of the law failed to meet its own criteria.

In direct violation to the law, observers noted that decisions of the polling station commissions were not made by majority vote, but by the arbitrary decisions of the government appointed Chairman and Secretary.

Much confusion was created over the failure to ensure a sufficient number of protocols in the polling stations, permitting each polling commissioner to obtain an official copy of the final results as provided for by the law.

The accuracy of the voter register was questioned by both observers and party representatives on the polling commissions.

During the counting process observers noted several instances where the voter register was altered to bring it in line with the number of votes cast. In some polling stations the number of ballots cast exceeded the number of signatures on the voter register. Also, there were widespread reports of the alteration of ballots to make them invalid.

The observers considered that the presence of armed individuals and unidentified persons inside polling stations did have an intimidating effect on voters and polling commission officials. Observers pointed out that the national authorities have a duty during the election process to prevent intimidation of election officials, candidates and voters.

It should be stressed that while the above problems were identified in the course of the observation, there were many individual Albanians who did contribute their time and energy to this election process in a dedicated manner.

A final ODIHR report on election will be released in two weeks.

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