



PRESS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

Competitive Albanian elections weakened by insufficient political will and system open to abuse

TIRANA, 4 July 2005 - The parliamentary elections in Albania on 3 July complied only partially with international commitments and standards for democratic elections. The elections were competitive and voters were provided with a diversity of information. While the Central Election Commission has so far administered the elections professionally, state and local authorities and major political parties have yet to demonstrate political will that corresponds with their responsibilities for the electoral process.

These are the preliminary conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) for the parliamentary elections in Albania on 3 July. Some 410 observers from 36 countries observed the elections for the four organizations represented in the mission.

"Overcrowding, delays and uncertainty regarding identification of voters gave an impression of disorganization, but so far few allegations of serious irregularities have been substantiated," said Jørgen Grunnet, Head of the Election Observation Mission of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Doris Pack, MP, who headed the delegation from the European Parliament, said: "The election system remains open to abuse. Intentionally inaccurate voter lists have left voters disillusioned."

Senator Jerzy Smoravinski, Head of Delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, added: "The delay in launching the electoral reforms to address the shortcomings from previous elections affected negatively the preparation and conduct of these elections. The authorities and political parties should continue the reforms without delay, in order to redress the remaining shortcomings noted by the IEOM."

Ambassador Andreas Nothelle, who co-ordinated the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Delegation, said: "The Albanian voters and the local voting commissions were obviously dedicated to making use of their rights and having free and fair elections. With that they showed more democratic maturity than some of their political leaders, who should understand that reciprocal allegations aimed at influencing international observers create distrust, detrimental to the development of a democratic society."

Election day was generally peaceful but a few violent incidents, one fatal, cast a shadow over the process. The conduct of the poll showed only limited progress over previous elections. In many cases observers noted incorrect procedures, particularly with regard to the use of ink to prevent multiple voting, the secrecy of the vote and the checking of voters' identities.

While some voters were turned away from polling stations because their names did not appear on voter lists, this affected relatively few voters. A few polling stations could not open on time since they did not receive voter lists.

The OSCE/ODIHR will remain in Albania to continue the observation until the completion of the election process, vote count and hearing and ruling on complaints.