



## **Albania's elections saw inclusive campaigning and improved administration, but misuse of state resources was of concern, international observers say**

TIRANA, 26 April 2021 – The Albanian parliamentary elections were characterized by a lively and inclusive campaign, thanks to a legal framework that helped ensure respect of fundamental freedoms. At the same time the campaign saw authorities taking advantage of public office and allegations of pervasive vote buying, international observers said in a [statement](#) today.

The joint observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), found that in spite of some ambiguities and inconsistencies, the legal framework forms an adequate basis for democratic elections to take place. Recent changes to the legal framework provided additional safeguards and were based on a broad political consensus. The new election administration coped well with the extensive new tasks it had taken on, and enjoyed overall trust.

“Last year's political agreement triggered important reforms and introduced e-technology which served to boost confidence in the electoral process. This shows that political compromise and convergence serves the best interest of the Albanian people,” said Azay Guliyev, Special co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers. “I encourage all political forces to maintain the same spirit in the steps that follow election day and to take additional actions to pre-empt a misuse of administrative resources and pressure on public civil servants in future electoral cycles.”

Some 3.5 million people were registered to vote in the elections, which took place against the backdrop of the global COVID-19 pandemic. While fundamental freedoms were respected, messaging during the election campaign focused on party leaders rather than political platforms. The tone of the language used during the campaign by some leading politicians was confrontational, and at the same time, the media did not provide essential information for the voters to make their choice. The prevalence of vote buying throughout the country was also of concern.

“In spite of the general improvements to the overall framework, allegations of widespread practices of vote buying throughout the election process remain a serious problem in Albania, and this has a negative impact on the general public perception and trust in the electoral process. So do the incentives and the pressure put on civil servants,” said Aleksander Pocij, Head of the PACE delegation. “PACE and the Venice Commission are ready to continue the collaboration with the Albanian authorities to further improve the legal electoral framework in the country.”

The newly introduced electronic voter identification system was set up in all polling stations. Its aim was to reduce the risk of voter fraud, although the hasty introduction left no time for a public discussion or independent scrutiny of the new system. While the process on election day itself was mostly transparent and smooth, pandemic-related measures were poorly implemented and social distancing was not always respected.

“The introduction of e-voting technology represents an important and welcome improvement for Albania. I was pleased to witness the large-scale effectiveness of the biometric identification system, which was used countrywide. This is an important step which can only strengthen confidence in the electoral process,” said Reinhold Lopatka, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. “I was concerned about the incidents that have preceded election day and I want to underscore that incitement to violence will not be tolerated.”

Despite a well-developed legal framework in place to stop the misuse of state resources, many public figures continued to campaign during their official capacity. This, together with the launch of several



large government infrastructure projects in the run-up to the election, gave the ruling party a considerable advantage.

“After the many political conflicts in Albania in recent times, it is encouraging to see that trust in the election process is slowly being rebuilt,” said Urszula Gacek, who headed the ODIHR limited election observation mission. “All parties participated and voters turned out in greater numbers. It is regrettable that irregularities such as misuse of office and instances of vote buying still remain.”

The international election observation mission to the Albanian parliamentary elections totalled 125 observers from 32 countries, consisting of 42 ODIHR-deployed experts and long-term observers, 60 parliamentarians and staff from the OSCE PA, and 23 from PACE.

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