



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

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**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

This report is strictly preliminary, based on available information at this juncture. Observers are still making their assessments in the field and we will have much more detailed information in the next few days. The reports from the international observers are still being processed. We expect to provide a consolidated report on the first round of these elections on Wednesday 2 July. The final report, which the political parties are committed to respecting as foreseen in the Political Contract of 9 May 1997, will only be issued after the second round of these elections is completed.

**Pre-election Period**

The pre-election period was marred by a number of problems, mainly stemming from the overall situation in the country. The security conditions, in particular, made normal technical preparations and observations difficult in the extreme.

These problems were mainly of a procedural nature, relating to the inability to strictly observe the timetable set forth in the Electoral Law. As a result, the necessary flow of

information to the electorate was uneven throughout the country. In some cases, voters were not sufficiently informed to be able to select objectively among the candidates.

This, coupled with the serious hindrances in campaigning brought about by the security situation, made normal preparations for election day extremely difficult.

However, the Albanian authorities responsible for the administration of the election, particularly the Central Election Commission, displayed a high degree of commitment and responsibility in seeking to overcome the very real problems facing them.

### *Election Day*

Despite minor flaws in many areas, and some very serious problems in a few areas, the Albanian people yesterday showed their strong desire for a democratic future for Albania. Although great difficulties during the past few weeks caused many observers to doubt the ability of the Albanian authorities to conduct successful elections, the large turnout of voters demonstrated that Albania, in close cooperation with the OSCE, was able to hold elections in a reasonably orderly fashion.

In addition, the more than 500 international observers, of which over 100 were parliamentarians, monitored and observed a broad cross-section of the voting process in all areas of the country.

We believe, therefore, that we can say that the elections can be considered as adequate and acceptable at this stage because:

- of the large participation of voters,
- voters were generally able to cast their ballot without fear or intimidation, although there are reports of some serious problems with the counting process in a few zones,
- the conduct of the electoral commissions appears to have been, in most cases, correct and nonpartisan, although we know that some areas experienced problems. The most abhorrent of these was a murder in the Fier area, that may have been linked to the election process,
- domestic and international observers were, for the most part, granted access to all stages of the voting and counting without interference or intimidation.

The results of these elections can be the foundation for a stable democratic system, which Albanians want and deserve. It is essential, however, that all Albanian political parties observe the commitments they have made to respect the results of the election and not to interfere in any way with the counting process or the conduct of the second round. We recall that the international community expects a major effort towards national reconciliation after the elections. Without such reconciliation, there will be no basis for defining the terms of international aid.

We should like to commend the OSCE, and in particular the efforts of Dr. Franz Vranitzky, the Multinational Protection Force, as well as the Council of Europe and the European Union for the tremendous contribution that they have made to the international effort to help build democracy in Albania.

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