

Observers note improved administration and inclusive campaign in Albanian elections



Azay Guliyev and Reinhold Lopatka in a polling station in Tirana, 25 April 2021

A joint observation mission of the OSCE PA, ODIHR and PACE found that the 25 April Albanian parliamentary elections were characterized by a lively and inclusive campaign. In spite of some ambiguities and inconsistencies, the legal framework forms an adequate basis for democratic elections to take place, observers found. Recent legal changes 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, according to the post-election statement issued on Monday.

While fundamental freedoms were respected, 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.

OSCE PA Vice-President Azay Guliyev (Azerbaijan) served as Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers, and OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia Reinhold Lopatka (Austria) led the OSCE PA's delegation of observers of 62 parliamentarians and staff from 21 OSCE countries. In his remarks on the election, Guliyev emphasized that last year's political agreement triggered important reforms and introduced e-technology that served to boost confidence in the electoral process, demonstrating that political compromise and convergence serves the best interest of the Albanian people.

Lopatka stressed that he 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," Lopatka said.

SG Roberto Montella also participated in the mission, and together with Guliyev, met with President Ilir Meta, Prime Minister Edi Rama, Foreign Minister Olta Xhaçka, and leaders of the opposition. Deploying in Tirana, Durres, Vlore, Shkoder and Gjirokaster, the OSCE PA's mission was supported by Francesco Pagani, Stéphanie Koltchanov, Freyja Koci, Daria Boyarskaya, and Anna Di Domenico from the International Secretariat.

High-level PA participation in the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

The OSCE PA participated in OSCE's Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting this week, with PA President Peter Lord Bowness (United Kingdom) speaking Monday at the opening session and Third Committee Chair Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus) speaking Tuesday at a session on enhancing democratic debate and legislative impact.

In his remarks, Bowness focused on the impact of COVID-19 on parliaments and urged a return to the normal democratic process for making laws as quickly as possible. "New technologies have a place," he said, "but we have a very long way to go before they can adequately replace the traditional workings of parliaments, when people engage in debates, discuss issues with colleagues, and see the whole atmosphere before they make up their mind with voting."

Hadjiyianni spoke about the need to guard against undue influence in the legislative process, saying that a robust legislative framework ensuring that corrupt practices are swiftly identified and punished is vital. He highlighted the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament recently adopted by the Cyprus House of Representatives, noting that the parliament is also considering legislation establishing an independent anti-corruption authority, as well as regulating lobbying and protection for whistleblowers. "More remains to be done in this direction," Hadjiyianni said.

The SHDM was co-organized by the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship and the OSCE/ODIHR. The meeting was intended as a platform for exchanging views on democratic lawmaking and ensuring that laws are in line with international human rights standards.

PA Special Representative on Eastern Europe meets with Head of OSCE Mission to Moldova

On 22 April, OSCE PA Special Representative on Eastern Europe Daniela De Ridder (Germany) met with Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova Claus Neukirch to discuss developments in Moldova and the Transnistrian settlement process. Amb. Neukirch noted that the process continues to offer a good opportunity for dialogue between the 5+2 mediators and observers, but it has stalled in recent years.

The OSCE Mission, he said, continues to implement programmes preparing populations on both sides of the river for

reunification, employing a strategy of small steps that enjoyed a good dynamic until 2019, but has suffered stagnation since. He said that it is important to see progress, so that achievements are not rolled back.

De Ridder inquired about minority issues in Moldova and expressed interest in visiting the country, perhaps in a virtual format considering the COVID-19 situation. She also raised the possibility of including a session on Moldova at the next OSCE PA Leinsweiler Seminar.

Deputy SG Pallares shares OSCE PA work at Danish think tank event

OSCE PA Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares was a panelist at an event organized on 21 April by the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). Entitled "Gender, conflict settlement and democratization: Prospects and challenges for the OSCE agenda," the event featured the participation of Head of the OSCE CiO Task Force Petra Lärke, who spoke about the agenda of the Swedish Chairpersonship, and Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre Tuula Yrjölä, who spoke about the OSCE's role in conflict resolution.

DSG Pallares's remarks covered a wide range of topics, providing a thorough overview of the work of the PA including its active involvement in promoting gender issues including in situations of armed conflict as shown by resolutions adopted in our Annual Session. He focused in particular on the PA's OSCE Call for Action to bring back high level political attention to the Organization. Parliamentarians can be vocal in flagging crucial political issues facing the region and press for governments to meet their OSCE commitments, Pallares said.