

INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION PRESS RELEASE

Albanian elections represent a missed opportunity

TIRANA, 19.02.2007 – The 18 February local elections in Albania represented a missed opportunity to conduct elections fully in line with international commitments and standards for democratic elections. Election day was calm overall, but voting was marred by procedural shortcomings and in some places, tension. Those are the conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission, IEOM, announced in Tirana today.

While the elections represented a competitive contest, political parties did not live up to the responsibilities granted to them by law and the electoral environment was marked by uncertainty and lack of trust between key election stakeholders.

“The lack of constructive engagement by the political parties has brought back previous concerns regarding their willingness to co-operate with each other in ensuring that the elections are held in compliance with OSCE Commitments,” said Jorgen Grunnet, who headed the long-term mission sent by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

The IEOM called for a determined effort to establish a reliable system for civil registration before the next elections and urged political parties not to abuse the issue in their debates.

Joseph Borg, who spoke on behalf of the delegation from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, said: “Although there was a competitive contest, we observed widespread procedural shortcomings which disenfranchised many eligible voters”.

Generally, candidates and parties could register without impediment and were able to freely convey their views to the electorate. Still, a few candidates who attempted to register as independents appeared to encounter undue obstacles.

Media provided a balanced coverage of the campaign and voters were able to make informed choices among a number of alternatives. However, the tone of the campaign deteriorated in the last week, focusing on personalized attacks, and a few violent incidents were noted.

On election day, procedural shortcomings were mainly related to the use of birth certificates. The voting centres opened late in a majority of polling stations where opening was observed, due to incomplete delivery of election material and late appointment of voting centres' members.

The visible ink used to mark voters' fingers was controversial, with opposition parties claiming that it could easily be removed. Group voting was frequently observed, as well as isolated cases of proxy and multiple voting. In Tirana, the similar colours of some of the ballots led to confusion and may have resulted in a number of ballots inserted in the wrong ballot boxes and thus rendered invalid.

For further information contact:

Urdur Gunnarsdottir, OSCE/ODIHR: +48 603 683 122, +355 692 979 845, urdur@odihr.pl
Jean-Philippe Bozouls, Council of Europe Congress: +33 672 754 297, jean-philippe.bozouls@coe.int

Ref. 112a07