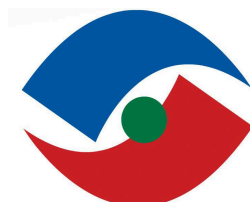


EDDA
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION



PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
ALBANIA
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 25 JUNE 2017

On 25 June 2017, parliamentary elections were held in the Republic of Albania. After a political agreement between the Socialist Party (SP) and Democratic Party (DP) had been reached, one was able to secure the participation of the opposition in the elections. Originally, on 5 December 2016, the president called for parliamentary elections to be held for 18 June 2017. Following protests and the DP boycott of the Parliament, the DP did not register for the parliamentary elections claiming that the SP-led government could not guarantee free and fair elections. International mediation and political pressure ended with a political agreement on 18 May, in which the president postponed the elections to 25 June 2017¹.

EDDA - European Dialogue and Democracy Association, conducted a short-term Election Observation Mission (EOM) in 3 electoral districts in the municipality of Tirana, during the parliamentary elections in Albania 25 June 2017.

EDDA sent a delegation of 13 short-term observers (STOs) as together with local interpreters observed the elections on Election Day. In total, 6 teams visited 55 different polling stations, observing 6 opening and 6 closing polling stations. The STOs were present in Tirana four days

¹ The OSCE EOM-report from parliamentary elections in Albania 25 June 2017.
<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/albania/325491?download=true>

prior to the election, and met with relevant international and national organizations and institutions in order to provide sufficient information regarding the current political, economic and social situation in Albania.

The STOs and the interpreters were officially accredited by the Albanian Central Election Committee (CEC), and the EOM complied to international standards for election observation and the electoral code of Albania. During the EOM in Albania, EDDA collaborated with the Danish organization, SILBA.

Prior to the EOM, the STOs received training in terms of an OSCE E-Learning course, training on the electoral code of Albania, and a two-hour election observation course in collaboration with the University of Bergen, Norway.

Opening procedures

The opening of the voting centres proceeded mostly in an orderly manner, and our observers was able to have a clear view of the procedures performed by the CEC. Our STOs observed the process without any restriction, and rated 50 per cent of the opening procedures at the observed voting centres as “very good”, while 10 per cent were rated as “bad”. Some voting centres were observed too open too late, meaning after 07:00 AM. Some voting centres were observed as chaotic, and in one case described as hurried. In one voting centre there were observed to be party activists present. Apart from these irregularities, the opening procedures were observed to have a high level of transparency, presence of all necessary election material and in accordance with established procedures.

Among the observers present during the opening procedures, partisan observers were dominant and 70 per cent of the chair persons representing CEC, were men.

General observations

EDDA's observers reported 63,8 per cent of the general proceedings during the voting centres on Election Day as “very good”, while 34,5 per cent was reported as “good”. 2 per cent of the general proceedings were reported as “bad”. Overall, the general proceedings done by the PSOs

were observed to be intact, with some irregularities. At one voting centre, the use of ink came before checking if the voter was on the voter's list. Officials sitting in wrong place, resulted in inked finger before discovering that the voter was not registered in the specific voting centre. In addition, there were some inappropriate activities by unauthorized persons.

In 3 of the voting centres, our observers reported tense environment within the voting centre, including several questions and inquires regarding the observer's intentions and findings. In general, many individuals were hanging both outside and inside the voting centres with an unclear motivation and purpose, expressing they were "about to vote" or they "lived close by". One of our teams reported suspiciousness during an incident of claimed volunteers helping voters to find their polling stations. The volunteers first expressed that they did not belong to a specific party or organization, but admitted they did after some while.

In several cases reported, the presence of our observers led to adjusted behaviour accordingly by the CEC. Our observer's presence seemed to make the CEC focus on, and pay strict attention to the voting procedures. There were some incidents of photos being taken inside the polling booths, but as observed, the incidents were taken care of in professional manners.

Regarding the secrecy of the vote, some irregularities were found especially were voting booths were placed very close to each other. In 6 voting centres observed, the secrecy of the vote was reported as failed. In addition, many voting centres had quite small rooms resulting in PSOs sitting directly beside the ballot box, voting booths or in front of a window giving someone outside the opportunity to observe the voting procedure. Often reported was the irregularities of ballot papers being folded in the wrong manner, with the possibility for outsiders to look for marks through the ballot box.

Close to the voting centres there were reported 5 incidents of campaign materials, mostly flags promoting the Democratic Party. In 24 incidents reported, the voting centres was challenging for disabled people, in which especially lack of entrance facilities were reported.

68,4 per cent of the polling station' staff were men, 31,6 per cent were women. EDDAs observers found the polling station officials trained in a satisfactory manner, including the chairperson.

Closing procedures

The closing time of the voting centres were postponed by one hour, from 07:00 PM to 08:00 PM. Our observers reported this to be an unclear decision, lack of information meaning different explanations of reasons behind the postponement were given. At midnight, CEC announced that the preliminary voter turnout was 45 per cent. The extended opening hour was an attempt to allow voters to cast their ballots².

The overall performance done by the voting centres officials were satisfactory, but the transparency level was rather low during the observations at the counting centres. Most of our observers were restricted from entering the counting centres, and reported the situations outside the counting centres as chaotic and overcrowded by media, armed officials and other people. The observation teams who observed the counting process inside the counting centre described the situation as chaotic. Our observers were placed too far from the counting tables, meaning difficulties observing the procedures followed. Due to poor quality of equipment, the ballot papers and the marks was not visible on camera.

It should be noted, that because of the the late start of the counting process, and the restrictions to enter the counting centres, the data on the closing procedures is not as sufficient as the two other sections in the report.

Preliminary conclusions

In general, the Election Day during the parliamentary elections in the republic of Albania 25 June 2017, is evaluated to have been organized in a good manner, despite some small irregularities. The opening and closing proceedings were in some cases reported as chaotic, while the general observations were observed to lack the secrecy of the vote, procedures failings done by the PSOs, campaign materials close to the polling station and some tension inside and outside a few voting centres.

² The OSCE EOM-report from parliamentary elections in Albania 25 June 2017.
<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/albania/325491?download=true>