

**INTERVIEW OF THE HEAD OF THE OSCE PRESENCE IN ALBANIA,  
AMBASSADOR EUGEN WOLLFARTH, TO DEUTSCHE WELLE**

*14 June 2013*

**DW:** Ambassador Wollfarth, Albania is on the eve of the 23 June parliamentary elections. OSCE presence in Albania is providing technical support to the CEC, in order to play its role in the elections' conducting in line with the OSCE standards and international ones. Could you please inform our audience where this support is addressed?

**Ambassador Wollfarth:** “The OSCE Presence’s election-related assistance has focused on providing technical support to professionalize the election administration. We were starting with the Central Election Commission, to educate voters and to train police about their role in the elections. In addition, we actively supported the consultative process for the 2012 Electoral Code reform, providing advice and hosting discussions for parliamentarians and experts on technical aspects of the reform, including on new voting technologies, to assist decision-makers in crafting appropriate legislation.”

**DW:** Unfortunately the CEC' s stalemate is going on. Does such a situation put in risk the efficiency of the OSCE technical assistance to CEC?

**Ambassador Wollfarth:** “I would invite to distinguish. It is not the CEC’s fault. The remaining members are doing their best. It is a political level decision and inaction, harming an important democratic process. No doubt, it is preferable and even mandatory, from a technical and a political point of view, to have a complete CEC. We are here to help building an even stronger Albanian democracy. Therefore, our work on training of election administration officials and police and supporting voter education continues and is proceeding unhindered.

**DW:** Would you have any suggestion to give an end to the CEC stalemate? Do you think that the normal functioning of the CEC, with all its members, is a basis for the efficiency of OSCE technical support?

**Ambassador Wollfarth:** “Dialogue and interaction between political parties is needed to build the credibility and legitimacy of the CEC. We have supported the professional functioning of the CEC since its establishment, and will continue to do so. Let me restate, the impact of our technical assistance to the CEC is not negatively affected by the stalemate. However, I would appeal to the political parties to refrain from continuously replacing the members of the Commission of the Electoral Administration Zones who have been already trained by the CEC, as this could have a serious, negative impact on the impartial and professional work of the Commissions.

**DW:** What does it mean to conduct elections "according to OSCE standards and commitments"? Please could you elaborate the meaning of these standards? One of the main basis for OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission to assess the elections of 23 June in Albania will be their compliance with these standards.

**Ambassador Wollfarth:** “Any OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission assesses elections based on the OSCE commitments. These commitments are primarily contained in the 1990 Copenhagen Document, which sets out the criteria OSCE is using, so that all elections in all countries are assessed against the same standards. There are commitments on

elections being held at regular intervals, secrecy of the ballot and separation between the state and political parties, to name just a few of the criteria.”

**DW:** Ambassador Wollfarth, what are the opportunities and challenges the Parliamentary elections of 23 June open to Albania?

**Ambassador Wollfarth:** “These elections are crucial to the democratization process, and will certainly have an impact on Albania’s speed in the reform agenda and based on this on potential progress towards European integration. As in previous elections, one of the basic problems remains the often missing political will to fully implement electoral legislation in good faith. While political competition is natural and good for democracy, negative rhetoric and actions by political leaders risk undermining the credibility and legitimacy of the election process. The Albanian political class has the opportunity to demonstrate maturity and dedication to building a strong future for Albania. They should show political good will and engage in constructive dialogue to address issues of concern – such as that regarding the CEC membership. Failure to do so may further slow Albania’s development and progress towards European integration – an outcome that benefits no one. In this context, I would recommend not to forget that consistent and responsible people usually get better access to financing. This is an aspect where private and political life do not differ too much.”

**DW:** The democratization of Albania and the consolidation of its democratic institutions are key processes, vital for Albania's path towards European integration. What could be done to make such OSCE contribution more visible towards citizens in order to increase their activism and participation in the processes?

**Ambassador Wollfarth:** “The OSCE Presence has been supporting the implementation of the Civil Society Charter – a document that lays the groundwork for cooperation between the government and civil society. We have also supported the civic education reform, initiated civic engagement activities for youth and created opportunities for youth to meet the representatives of key institutions and share their views on democracy. Support for constituent outreach activities among the MPs and citizens has been another of our priority activities engaging citizens. The outreach forums have created opportunities for interaction and exchange of views. In addition, the Presence has facilitated the participation of people with disabilities in decision-making through support of the Albanian National Council of People with Disabilities and the Disability Youth Forum. So, I think you can say we are very much engaged in citizen outreach and building up an active, effective civil society. What counts most for us, is the result. And this effort, we see on a good way.”

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