



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S INTERVIEW WITH *DEUTSCHE WELLE*

1 February 2013

By Arben Muka

DW: Mr. Ambassador, how do you consider the preparations for the 23 June parliamentary elections done so far?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “I see it as a preparation process that started well for the 2013 elections based on the new Electoral Code. The process is, however, in constant need of political good will. In a positive development, the electoral reform was completed by the Albanian Assembly in July 2012, eleven months before the parliamentary elections day 23 June 2013. A new Central Election Commission took office in mid-October and has since been busy with enacting acts in preparation of the elections, like the specification of election material or a training strategy for election commissions. Much important work lies ahead, but I believe the CEC has the full professional potential to prepare the elections properly and in time and conduct them in line with international standards. However, we have also seen some waves on technical issues, seemingly introduced from outside the CEC, preventing smoother sailing towards timely decision-making. I would like to reiterate my appeal to all sides demonstrate the necessary political good will for these upcoming elections.”

DW: What is and what will be the concrete engagement of the OSCE Presence in these elections?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “The OSCE Presence provided advice and also facilitated OSCE/ODIHR expertise to the Assembly during the electoral reform process. While following closely all the election-related developments, we have provided and will continue to provide assistance to the CEC to strengthen its professional and technical capacities for an increased performance in the upcoming elections. This is part of our mandate. In the weeks to come, the Presence will also help the OSCE/ODIHR to help preparing for a successful and efficient OSCE Election Observation Mission. An invitation in this respect was extended by the Albanian Government in 2012. From the OSCE side, we expect besides ODIHR also representatives on the level of active MPs of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.”

DW: There is a perception in the media and in part of the public opinion that the pre-electoral political situation is highly tensioned. Do you have the same feeling, and do you see this all fitting within the framework of party competition?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “This is not really new in Albania. It was visible already throughout the last months. I would say that we see a competitive election campaign developing. This is nothing unusual or unexpected – in my last annual report delivered to the OSCE participating States in September 2012, I noted that already. Not all liked to hear it, but not enough effort has been made to prove it wrong. Understand me right, please: it is normal and necessary to see political competition. However, each party should put most of its energy in presenting its ideas, to attract voters based on content and programmes for the

coming legislature. However, we witness focus on technical details and public attention deviated from the needs of the country. The needs I describe as making headway on the national reform agenda, making headway towards European integration. Politicizing the work of the election administration is not really helping to reach these goals. The election administration, starting with the CEC, is in place to implement the relevant legislation and procedures in a timely, impartial manner, to ensure that voters have the chance to freely and fairly express their will on Election Day. It was not put into place as a platform for political side shows.”

DW: Recently, politicians have been engaged in nationalistic rhetoric to the point of reviewing relations with neighbouring countries. What is your comment on such developments?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Albania has for most of the last two decades played a constructive, stabilizing role in the region. The recent rhetoric by some political leaders is not in line with that tradition. It also works against an improved image of Albania, which is much needed for economic and social development and integration. I would encourage the political leaders to focus on the reform agenda. There have been important achievements recently. There were common steps. There was headway achieved. This is constructive. There needs to be more of that constructive attitude.”

DW: On the second anniversary of 21 January, on behalf of the Presence, you took a critical stand with regard to the failure to shed full light into those tragic events, which saw four people losing their lives and numerous injured. In your opinion, what are the causes of such a performance by the justice system on the 21 January case?

Ambassador Wollfarth: “Shedding light on the events of 21 January 2011 merits the utmost efforts. Good and functional justice also needs to consider timeframes. The delivery of a timely –and-- convincing judgement as the result of a procedure in full adherence with the law is the target to be reached. It is important to see that quite recently the legal proceedings seem to have moved to a more dynamic phase. I welcome this.”

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