

HEAD OF PRESENCE INTERVIEW WITH *ORA NEWS TV*

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In your opinion, did Albania manage to meet the standards set by the European Union and the international community on elections?

I am, first of all, very happy that the counting is over. The final report on the observation, how the process went, will come from ODIHR. Jonathan Stonestreet and his team have observed these elections and also the counting process and they keep observing. However, for us here also it was really a heartbeat race. My thoughts were all the time with the candidates. The pulse must have been so high and maybe still is, since we have preliminary results. The difference in the preliminary result is more than razor-thin and every voter now sees that every vote counts. It is a very important day for democracy and it could have not been more dramatic.

Was such a narrow difference predictable?

It is impressive how close it got. It is a heartbeat moment and I congratulate both politicians. They are great politicians. I am very sure that we will see a lot more from both of them. But at this moment I also think of my excellent colleagues - US Ambassador Alexander Arvizu and EU Ambassador Ettore Sequi. We have worked closely together, we cared about due process, just as Jonathan Stonestreet and his team did. We tried to ensure that the process could be materialized. With our hearts and our minds, and I would like to include the esteemed colleagues I just mentioned, we are clearly with the candidates and for a due process and, therefore, also with the citizens of Tirana and Albania, not forgetting that many other candidates still wait for the results of their count.

Who do you think was the greatest winner in this process, regardless of who will sit on the chairs?

Democracy. Democracy has won and that might be an important step ahead towards an even better future of city development. It was a local government election, let us not forget. Yet it will certainly have also, I hope, very positive repercussions at a national level.

Both parties are claiming victory. How will this be solved?

Through the counting process and my applause also go to the people that worked there. It was extremely hard work. That process was observed in a very close way by ODIHR, by national observers, by observers coming from many other countries and it was also closely observed by the media with a very, very good coverage. So, therefore, I see a clear winner – that is in the first place democracy, which is good for the further development of Albania and the winner, once we have the final result, will also have the comfortable feeling “it was a clear win” and that is good, which is important. What I find really impressive is something that is clearly coming from the voters no matter what the final arithmetic will show. When it is so balanced, I see a clear message in it, that is the one for co-operation across the political aisle, between the main political parties and this paves the way for a better future for all Albanians. Having had that choice and making use of that choice from the citizens, this was a super moment for democracy and I don not think Alfred Hitchcock could not have directed a better dramatic finale.

Do you think that the loser will congratulate the winner?

It is certainly a good sign when the ones that were fighting in a very special environment of the political scene would find such a way of communication after it's all over. But, I would like to add, there is no loser. I see both candidates as great politicians. We will see more of them in the future. I will leave it to them how they will conduct themselves. I see progress, better co-operation, good understanding and a lot of that we have seen also in the counting process today.

Are the citizens divided into left and right wing?

The voters now should look at normal life, being productive, being good citizens while doing their job and, hopefully, those who do not have a job currently will be able to find one soon. So, going back to normal life, like young people going back to school after having had a break. Certainly this was certainly a week for having a break! Major tasks lie ahead for all of us - certainly for those that lead the authorities here in the cities and municipalities. So a lot of tasks to tackle. I would wish for a normal working atmosphere as soon as possible.

[PAUSE WHILE LISTENING TO LIVE STATEMENT FROM THE PRIME MINISTER]

What are your impressions of the Prime Minister's statement right now?

The Prime Minister has shown leadership and he has used the right words in expressing his respect for due process, waiting for the final results to be published by CEC and calling on the voters, supporters of both parties to celebrate in a sort of calm way. That is great leadership. That was very important. It is very important now not to 'overheat'. I can understand the emotions. I have mentioned earlier the heartbeat even I felt here. As we see now, it is not only a time factor, it is also a precision factor. To be precise in putting that political 'mosaic' back together again - the will of the voters that was in the ballot boxes to be taken out and to be put together to a precise picture. And it is a quarter of a million or even more of votes, of mosaic stones of pieces that were put together. So it will certainly take more than a minute to verify that every single stone was and is in the right position. So time is a factor. But precision is a factor too. I would join the Prime Minister in inviting let us to be civilized and to wait for the final results.

The citizens did have some prejudice about the voting, given the incidents during the electoral campaign. Now that the voting and the counting process were calm, do you think we have no right to have prejudice about what is going to happen next?

It is better to think about opportunities, possibilities and how to do things right in the future, to learn from past actions. The future can be a very bright one and it comes through bridging the gap between the camps and moving the country forward at all levels. I think it is a very important day for Tirana. A very important day for Albania. It looks like that Albania is very close to making a big step ahead.

You referred earlier to a mosaic and it is not one of the easiest things to make. Do you think we have to wait another week to have results?

That is a fair question that, first of all, should be asked to the CEC. It may well happen, but then again the counting process was observed so closely and it was done as I could see from my position, with a lot of energy. Let us wait for the findings of the CEC themselves. Let us see what ODIHR has to report on the observations. And let us wait for the final results. From my position, I can say it was full of good will and this is an extremely important starting point. And that will probably make the difference also this time.

What is your opinion of the media coverage of the campaign and especially of the counting process? How important was the transparency provided by the media and especially *Ora News*, which was the most balanced TV station?

I think that the coverage *Ora* gave on the counting was extremely important in helping to build confidence from the voters in the counting process, and not only the voters, also the political parties and their militants. It is very important to have that insight and *Ora* did that in a fabulous way. We also listened to it on the radio and it was almost like reporting a feverish football match and I too 'fevered' with the candidates, as I said earlier. So the contribution was clearly a very high and a very good one.

Thank you, Ambassador! Would you have any final word to say in this interview?

Faleminderit shumë! Albania is a wonderful country and... what a week!