



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

LOCAL ELECTIONS

14 May 2023

**ODIHR Election Observation Mission
Final Report**



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following an invitation to observe the 14 May 2023 local elections, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 6 April. The ODIHR EOM assessed the compliance of the electoral processes with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, as well as domestic legislation. For election day, the ODIHR EOM joined forces with delegations of the European Parliament (EP) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (the Congress) to form an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM).

In its Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions issued on 15 May, the IEOM concluded that the elections “were generally well-administered, competitive and held with the participation of the key political forces, but the process was characterized by continued polarization between the main political parties and deep division within the opposition. Contestants could campaign freely, but issues of importance for local communities barely featured in the campaign. Cases of misuse of state resources at central and local levels, claims of pressure on public-sector workers and voters, and allegations of vote buying were of concern. The Central Election Commission (CEC) organized its work in a transparent and efficient manner, but the stability of lower-level commissions was negatively affected by frequent replacements of members by the nominating parties. Rules for political coverage of the campaign strongly favour the main parties, and the frequent use by media of party-produced content in news programmes undermined comprehensive and objective campaign coverage. Election day was generally peaceful but was negatively affected by numerous cases of party interference in the process as well as technical and procedural problems, widespread group voting and problems with the secrecy of the vote. The vote count was assessed positively overall.”

The electoral legal framework provides an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections. Yet, some limitations to suffrage rights remain at odds with international standards, and several Electoral Code provisions are not in line with international good practice. In 2020, authorities addressed a number of previous ODIHR recommendations, but many remain to be implemented, including those related to the composition of lower-level election commissions, the mechanism for withdrawal of candidates, criminal liability for defamation and equal rights of party and citizen observers. Mayors and municipal councillors are directly elected for four-year terms. Mayors are elected in first-past-the-post contests and councillors - under a closed-list proportional system.

The elections were generally well managed by the election administration, although the nomination of the lower-level commissions was problematic. The CEC organized its work transparently and efficiently, holding regular and open sessions. Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed trust in the CEC and noted increased transparency in decision-making. Eligible political parties liberally used their right to recall lower-level commission members, which affected the stability of these commissions, diminished the value of training and did not allow for consistent adherence to election-day procedures. In this respect, political parties failed to live up to the considerable rights and responsibilities given to them under the Electoral Code.

¹ The English version of this report is the only official document. Unofficial translation is available in Albanian.

The final voter lists included some 3.6 million eligible voters, including a significant proportion of voters living abroad. Overall, ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed trust in the accuracy of the voter lists, but restrictions on the right to vote based on intellectual and psychosocial disability are at odds with OSCE commitments and international obligations. On election day, voters were identified through electronic identification devices which, in most cases, functioned properly, but a high share of technical issues confused polling staff and voters.

Candidate registration was overall inclusive, and 40 parties and coalitions, as well as 12 independent candidates contested the elections, with a total of 144 mayoral candidates and 852 candidate lists for municipal councils. Existing limitations to the right to stand for people whose guilt in committing a crime has not been established by a final court decision are at odds with international standards. Independent candidates faced more onerous requirements than parties when collecting signatures.

The fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression were respected, overall, and electoral contestants could campaign freely. Voters had a distinct choice, with the elections to municipal councils secondary to the mayoral contests. The visible but rather low-key campaign revolved around the major parties and their national leaders, at the expense of a campaign focused on local candidates and issues, and to the detriment of local democracy. The tone of the campaign was mostly moderate, yet, confrontational rhetoric was present. Social networks were used extensively in the campaign.

The 2020 legal amendments introduced further safeguards against abuse of state resources. Although the authorities cannot propose, approve, or issue decisions providing benefits to the population four months prior to election day, there were numerous activities, both by the central government and various local administrations, that ran counter to this rule. The CEC's narrow and formalistic interpretation that this provision applies only to parliamentary but not local elections did little to guarantee a level playing field. In addition, most ministers, although not standing as candidates, prominently participated in the ruling party's campaign, without a clear distinction between their official and campaign activities. The prime minister on several occasions conditioned future government support to municipalities on the election results. ODIHR EOM interlocutors often alleged intimidation of voters, pressure on public-sector workers and vote buying.

There are 50 women out of 140 members of parliament (35 per cent) and 13 women out of 17 government ministers. Women were well represented on candidate lists due to a legal 50-per cent gender quota (although the quota was not always respected), but only 15 women were among the 144 mayoral candidates (10 per cent). Women candidates featured in most rallies observed by the ODIHR EOM, but only 8 per cent of the monitored campaign coverage in media was devoted to women. No concerns were raised about misogynistic rhetoric, threats, or hate speech directed against women in the electoral context. Eight women, all representing the ruling party, were elected as mayors. Women were underrepresented in the election administration, particularly in decision-making positions.

Contestants may finance their campaigns from public and private funds, but independent candidates are not entitled to public funding, contrary to international good practice. The law provides limits for donations and campaign expenditures. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns about the lack of transparency of campaign finance before election day, as, by this day, contestants are not required to submit interim campaign finance reports or to disclose the source and amount of funds raised. The late allocation of public funds and the late definition of the limits for campaign expenditures did not contribute to legal certainty. The CEC is in charge of campaign finance oversight.

The legal framework for the media overall provides safeguards for freedom of expression and access to information; however, legal provisions on access to information are not adequately implemented. The media environment is diverse, but it is characterized by systemic problems, including the undue

concentration of media ownership and the control exerted by intertwined business and political interests. These affect media editorial autonomy and make journalists vulnerable to pressure and self-censorship. The rules for campaign coverage by broadcast media provide the main parliamentary parties with a significant advantage, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice. According to ODIHR EOM media monitoring results, the campaign in media was characterized by recurrent personal attacks among politicians and the absence of debates among contestants. In their news programmes, broadcasters often resorted to what appeared to be pre-recorded party material, rarely labelled, and fell short of providing comprehensive and objective coverage of the campaign.

The Electoral Code provides adequate procedural guarantees for the resolution of election disputes. The CEC's Complaints and Sanctions Commission (CSC) handled complaints in a collegial manner and open sessions; however, in some cases, it took contradictory decisions, failing to create a consistent interpretation of the law, or left plaintiffs without effective legal remedy. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors questioned the impartiality of the CSC members due to their alleged political affiliation. The Electoral College, judicial final instance in election disputes, adjudicated cases in public sessions, with the participation of the parties involved. The decisions of the Electoral College were well reasoned, but some of their decisions were published with significant delay.

The Electoral Code provides for observation of all stages of the electoral process by citizen and international observers. In an inclusive process, the CEC accredited a total of 452 citizen and 557 international observers. Representatives of parties, coalitions, independent candidates and media can also be accredited to observe. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, only party observers but not citizen and international observers are entitled to receive copies of the voting results protocols. Several civil society organizations monitored the use of administrative resources and compliance with campaign regulations, and some deployed a small number of observers on election day.

Election day was generally peaceful but was negatively affected by numerous cases of party interference in the process as well as technical and procedural problems. The IEOM assessed opening negatively in a significant number of voting centres observed due to procedural and technical problems observed. Voting was assessed negatively in 7 per cent of voting centres observed, which is of concern. Voting procedures were generally respected, but the IEOM observed widespread cases of group voting and problems with the secrecy of the vote. The IEOM also noted instances of proxy voting, tension, voter intimidation and attempts to influence voters. The closing of voting centres and the receipt of election material at Ballot Counting Centres (BCCs) were assessed positively.

The vote count was assessed negatively in 8 per cent of the BCCs observed. Procedures were generally adhered to, but not always consistently, transparency was limited, and isolated cases of tension and interference by party activists were observed by the IEOM. Due to the workload and physical exhaustion, the Commissions of Election Administration Zones interrupted the counting process in a dozen BCCs observed. The CEC promptly posted preliminary and final election results disaggregated by voting centres. The mayoral election results in one municipality were annulled by the Electoral College and were repeated on 23 July.

This report offers recommendations to support efforts to bring elections in Albania closer in line with OSCE commitments, international obligations and standards for democratic elections. Priority recommendations relate to the thorough, timely and transparent measures against misuse of administrative resources and other electoral violations, genuine efforts to combat vote-buying practices, the need for meaningful electoral reform to ensure secrecy of the voting, decriminalize defamation, guarantee editorial freedom of media outlets, support independent journalism, strengthen the effectiveness of the election administration and facilitate the proper access to information. ODIHR stands

ready to assist the authorities to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following an invitation to observe the 14 May 2023 local elections and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 6 April. The mission, led by Ambassador Audrey Glover, consisted of a 14-member core team based in Tirana and 24 long-term observers deployed on 13 April to 12 locations around the country. The ODIHR EOM remained in the country until 24 May.

For election day, the ODIHR EOM was joined by delegations of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (the Congress) and the European Parliament (EP) to form an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM). Each of the institutions involved in the IEOM has endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. Stewart Dickson was the head of the Congress delegation, and Sven Simon led the EP delegation. On election day, 246 observers from 31 countries were deployed, including 216 observers deployed by ODIHR, as well as a 20-member delegation by the Congress and a 10-member delegation by the EP. Women accounted for 51 per cent of IEOM observers.

The ODIHR EOM assessed the compliance of the electoral process with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, as well as domestic legislation. This final report follows a Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions which was released at a press conference in Tirana on 15 May.²

The ODIHR EOM wishes to thank the authorities of Albania for the invitation to observe the elections, and the Central Election Commission for their assistance. The ODIHR EOM also expresses its appreciation to other state and local institutions, political parties, media and civil society organizations, representatives of the international community and other interlocutors for sharing their views and for their co-operation.

III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Albania is a parliamentary republic, with legislative powers vested in a 140-member unicameral parliament elected for four-year terms. The government led by the prime minister has broad executive powers. The president is the head of state and is elected by parliament for a five-year term.

In the 2019 local elections, a coalition led by the ruling Socialist Party (SP) won 60 of the 61 municipalities.³ The opposition Democratic Party (DP), the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI; since then renamed to the Freedom Party (FP)) and some smaller parties boycotted the elections. On 6 March 2022, by-elections were held in six municipalities where the mayor's office had fallen vacant.⁴

² See the previous [ODIHR election-related reports on Albania](#).

³ A candidate of the Greek Ethnic Minority for the Future (MEGA) party was elected mayor of Finiq municipality.

⁴ By-elections were held in Dibër, Durrës, Lushnjë, Rogozhinë, Shkodër and Vorë. The Democratic Party of Albania-Refoundation Commission (DPRC) led by Sali Berisha, running under the House of Freedom coalition, won in Shkodër, while the SP retained the other five mayoral positions.

The SP also won the 2021 parliamentary elections receiving 74 seats in parliament.⁵ SP leader Edi Rama has retained the post of prime minister for a third term since 2013. Following the 2021 elections and the United States government's public designation of former prime minister and long-standing DP leader Berisha as *persona non grata*, the DP has undergone internal division, including a dispute over its legal representation.⁶

Overall, the political environment continued to be characterized by the dominance of traditional political elites and deep polarization between the major parties, manifested also by a stalemate over electoral reform in 2021-2023. Furthermore, the SP enjoyed an overarching advantage of incumbency in all sectors of public life, which having accumulated over the last decade was seen by many ODIHR EOM interlocutors as potentially affecting the principle of separation of powers.

The current government has 13 women out of the 17 ministers.⁷ Of 140 members of parliament, 50 are women (35 per cent), including the Speaker. The majority of the members of the Constitutional Court and the Electoral College are also women.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Local elections are primarily regulated by the Constitution and the Electoral Code (both last amended in 2020).⁸ Secondary legislation includes the Law on Political Parties, the Law on Demonstrations, the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Guaranteeing the Integrity of Persons Elected, Appointed, or Exercising Public Functions (the so-called Law on Decriminalization), as well as regulations issued by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Albania is a party to major international instruments related to democratic elections and is a member of the Council of Europe's Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).⁹

The electoral legal framework is an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections, but it contains limitations to suffrage rights, which are at odds with international standards, as well as some inconsistencies and ambiguities caused by the 2020 legal amendments.¹⁰ The Electoral Code is primarily tailored to parliamentary elections and therefore, in some cases, lacks clarity about local elections,

⁵ The DP-led Alliance for Change won 59 seats, the SMI - 4 and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) - 3.

⁶ After the DP's defeat in the March 2022 mayoral by-elections, Lulzim Basha resigned as party leader, and Enkelejd Alibeaj became acting DP chairperson. On 25 March 2022, the Tirana District Court registered statutory changes adopted by a DP National Convention, and on 22 May, Mr. Berisha was elected as party chair. On 3 March 2023, upon Mr. Alibeaj's appeal, several days before the deadline for submission of candidate lists, the Tirana Court of Appeals repealed the 25 March 2022 decision in question and returned the case for reconsideration, leaving the legal representation of the party to Mr. Alibeaj. The Court published this decision only on 11 May despite a legal requirement to do so within two weeks. On 15 May, the DPRC appealed this decision to the Supreme Court.

⁷ In November 2022, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development [commended](#) efforts by the Albanian government to ensure women's participation in governing and decision-making bodies, including the central government and civil service.

⁸ The Law on Protection of National Minorities provides for full political, civil and social rights for people belonging to national minorities. There are nine officially recognized national minorities: the Aromanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Egyptian, Greek, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Roma and Serb minorities.

⁹ Including the 1966 [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), 1965 [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), 1979 [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW), 1990 [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families](#), 2003 [UN Convention against Corruption](#), 2006 [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD), as well as the 1950 [European Convention on Human Rights](#) and the 1998 [Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#).

¹⁰ For example, Article 145.2 of the Electoral Code refers to the older version of Article 24, which was repealed by the July 2020 amendments; the restriction on the voting rights of people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities was removed from Article 44 but remained in the Constitution (Article 45) and in Article 53 of the Electoral Code.

undermining legal certainty.¹¹ Some laws, for instance, the Law on Decriminalization, which pertains to limitations on suffrage rights, need to be harmonized with the Electoral Code to ensure consistency.¹² In addition, some provisions related to election administration, candidate registration, campaign finance and election dispute resolution are not in line with international good practice.

The provisions introduced by the 2020 legal amendments addressed several previous ODIHR recommendations, including those on safeguards against misuse of administrative resources and strengthened guarantees for gender balance on candidate lists. However, the lack of regulation of third-party campaigning and ambiguous provisions aimed to deter misuse of state resources during the campaign leave loopholes that limit the consistency and comprehensiveness of the legal framework.

The narrow interpretation of the law was evident in some CEC decisions, contributing to the ambiguity on how some provisions should be applied (see *Election Campaign*). The late adoption and delayed publication of some binding acts limited the transparency of the electoral process and reduced the opportunity for stakeholders and voters to familiarize themselves with the rules promptly, contrary to good practice.¹³

Sub-legal acts regulating the electoral process should be adopted in a timely manner to ensure legal certainty, effective preparation and public understanding.

Many previous ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including those related to the composition of lower-level election commissions, the mechanism for withdrawal of candidates, suffrage rights of people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, criminal liability for defamation, use of campaign materials prepared by political parties in the news and equal rights of party and citizen observers. In February 2022, parliament set up an *ad hoc* committee on electoral reform to follow up on outstanding ODIHR recommendations. In October 2022, the State Election Commissioner (the Commissioner) proposed updates to the Electoral Code, *inter alia* regarding the operation of lower-level election commissions, the financing of election campaigns and activities of public officials during the campaign. However, the *ad hoc* committee did not propose any amendments before the elections.

To ensure a comprehensive and consistent electoral framework, all decision-making entities, including parliament, its political parties and other electoral stakeholders, should commit to meaningful electoral reform and address all ODIHR recommendations.

Direct elections were held for 61 mayors and 1,613 municipal councillors throughout the country for four-year terms. Mayors are elected in first-past-the-post contests, while councillors are elected under a closed-list proportional system.¹⁴ The constituencies for local elections are the territories of the municipalities, and the number of councillors in each municipality varies from 15 to 61, depending on its population. There is no threshold to qualify for seat allocation in municipal councils.¹⁵

¹¹ For example, Article 91.4 of the Electoral Code establishes a four-month ban, before election day and until the establishment of a new government, during which the authorities cannot propose or issue decisions providing benefits to the population. The lack of clarity whether this article applies to local elections led to inconsistent implementation.

¹² The Law on Decriminalization contains restrictions of suffrage rights and detailed provisions on deregistration of candidacy, but there are no such provisions in the Electoral Code. In addition, the Law on Decriminalization does not contain provisions on the right to appeal against CEC decisions as it is foreseen in the Electoral Code.

¹³ For instance, the CEC decision of 22 April on determining the amount of public funds for campaign activities and parliament's decision of 26 April on allocation of campaign funds for political parties.

¹⁴ Local council mandates are allocated to parties and coalitions according to the d'Hondt method. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors from smaller political parties and civil society organizations expressed a preference for open-list proportional representation.

¹⁵ In its decision No. 31 of 4 October 2021, the Constitutional Court decided that 1 per cent threshold for individual candidates is incompatible with the Constitution.

V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The elections were administered by the CEC, 92 Commissions of Election Administration Zones (CEAZs) and 5,213 Voting Centre Commissions (VCCs).¹⁶ Counting was conducted in 92 Ballot Counting Centres (BCCs). All lower-level commissions are temporary bodies. Women were underrepresented throughout the election administration, particularly in decision-making positions. Although the Electoral Code prescribes a 30 per cent gender quota at all levels of the electoral administration, only 3 of the 12 CEC members are women, including the Deputy Commissioner. Some 29 per cent of CEAZ members were women, including 16 of the 92 chairpersons. Women constituted 24 per cent of VCC members (23 per cent of VCC chairs) in the voting centres observed by the IEOM.

The CEC consists of three separate steering bodies: the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner, the Regulatory Commission (the Regulator) and the Complaints and Sanctions Commission (CSC). The CEC is responsible for the overall conduct of elections, and its members are elected by parliament by no less than a three-fifths majority.¹⁷

The Commissioner manages the CEC administration and exercises executive powers; the Deputy Commissioner supervises the implementation of the electronic voter identification technology and the recruitment and training of election officials. The Regulator, within the powers delegated by the Electoral Code, sets rules for different aspects of the electoral process. The CSC adjudicates complaints against the Commissioner and CEAZs as well as imposes election-related sanctions.

Overall, the CEC operated efficiently and met most legal deadlines.¹⁸ The Commissioner adopted some 550 decisions related to candidate registration, reports on the misuse of administrative resources, election-day preparation, and appointment of CEAZ members and approval of election results. The Commissioner, Regulator and CSC separately held regular and open sessions that were live-streamed online. The ODIHR EOM noted that the interventions of party representatives in the CEC sessions did not always benefit the preparations for the elections.¹⁹ CEC decisions are generally posted on its website; however, the ODIHR EOM observed delays in the announcement of sessions and the publication of decisions by all three bodies, which limited transparency.²⁰ While most ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed trust in the CEC and noted increased transparency and openness in its decision-making, some questioned the impartiality of the CSC (see *Election Dispute Resolution*).

The CEAZs oversee elections in their respective zones. They consist of seven members and a non-voting secretary, nominated by the parliamentary majority and the opposition.²¹ The VCCs organize voting and

¹⁶ Two special voting centres in Tepelenë and Belsh prisons were approved by the CEC on 8 and 12 May, respectively.

¹⁷ The Commissioner is elected for seven years, the Deputy Commissioner for four years, the five Regulator's members - for five years and the five CSC members - for nine years.

¹⁸ The ODIHR EOM noted some delays in the allocation of free airtime to electoral subjects, in determining the order of the contestants on the ballots, the appointment of the CEAZ, VCC and members of counting teams, and the publication of the voter lists.

¹⁹ For example, the decision on what parties were entitled to nominate counting team members was postponed at least four times due to party representatives' requests, which led to late nominations.

²⁰ In a few instances, the CEC published decisions with a week delay or more. Some sessions were not announced in advance. In addition, due to the migration of the website to a secure server, the CEC could not publish announcements or decisions in a timely manner until 6 May.

²¹ For these elections, the CEAZs were composed of 2 SP, 2 DP, 1 SDP and 1 FP-nominated members. In even-numbered CEAZs, the seventh member was nominated by the SP, and in the odd-numbered ones – by the DP. The chairperson belongs to the party which nominated the seventh member, while the deputy chairperson and secretary represent the largest opposition or majority party, respectively.

are composed in the same manner as the CEAZs.²² Counting teams consist of four members, also nominated by the parliamentary majority and opposition.

The formation of the lower-level election administration was problematic, largely due to the failure of some eligible parties to nominate their representatives. By the legal deadline of 12 February, the CEC formed the CEAZs with only four or five members and often without a secretary. By law, the CEC could solicit applications from eligible citizens to complete the formation of the CEAZs; however, it waited for the ruling of the Tirana Court of Appeals on the dispute over the DP legal representation before appointing DP-nominated CEAZ members. In 84 CEAZs, the DP-nominated members were therefore appointed with a one-month delay.²³ Similarly, the VCCs had to be formed by 24 April, but due to late nominations and missing documents, most of the VCCs were formed with more than a week's delay. Counting teams had to be nominated by 4 May, but the Commissioner's decision on the parties eligible to nominate counting team members was appealed, which led to the delayed formation.²⁴

Contrary to previous ODIHR recommendations and international good practice, political parties may, at their discretion and without justification, recall or replace their commission members, thus impacting the stability of the election administration.²⁵ Between 12 February and election day, some 40 per cent of CEAZ members were replaced, as were at least 30 per cent of VCC members in the last four days before election day. In some areas, counting teams were not formed and trained until the end of voting on election day, due to missing documentation, withdrawals or resignations. Some parties informed the ODIHR EOM that they planned to replace all their VCC members to avoid them being pressured or bribed by their opponents. Many of the initial party nominations, therefore, appeared bogus in nature. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors also stated that the lower-level commissions remained vulnerable to political pressure and did not yet enjoy the full confidence of stakeholders.

The numerous replacements of members of the lower-level commissions did not allow for substantive training and consistent adherence to election-day procedures.²⁶ Overall, the ODIHR EOM assessed training sessions organized for election commissioners as comprehensive, although in some cases, the sessions were poorly attended and the quality depended on the knowledge and approach of the trainer.²⁷ According to the CEC, its communication with lower-level commissions was at times problematic, negatively affecting the election administration's ability to organize elections in a consistent manner.

In line with previous ODIHR recommendations and to ensure the stability of the election administration, consideration should be given to reviewing the system of nominating members and secretaries of the lower-level election administration. Measures should be introduced to exclude arbitrary replacements of members of the election administration.

²² Unlike the CEAZs, the VCCs do not have a non-voting secretary.

²³ Following the court ruling, 217 DP-nominated CEAZ members were appointed on 10 March and 33 CEAZ members - on 21 March. This also included the late appointment of secretaries in 42 CEAZs. In some cases, vacancies of secretaries were filled by the FP.

²⁴ In case of the complaint by the FP against the Commissioner's decision, the CSC could not reach a decision due to a split vote on 2 May. Following Electoral College review, the CSC rejected the FP complaint on 10 May.

²⁵ Section II.3.1.f of the Venice Commission's 2002 [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) states that "the bodies appointing members of electoral commissions must not be free to dismiss them at will".

²⁶ To address the high turnover, the CEC conducted additional training for CEAZ members. The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that only 27 per cent of VCC members were trained.

²⁷ The ODIHR EOM observed low turnout or no show-up during training sessions in the regions of Berat, Dibër, Durrës, Elbasan, Gjirokastrë, Lezhë and Tirana.

While the law requires voting centres to be located in accessible premises, 60 per cent of voting centres visited by the IEOM on election day were not readily accessible to voters with physical disabilities.²⁸ In addition, VCC members were not fully aware of the purpose of the Braille templates supplied to voting centres, and the voting booths adapted for the needs of people with physical disabilities were not always set up. Voting machines used in the e-voting pilot project were not adapted for independent use by people with visual impairments. The CEC conducted an extensive voter education campaign, including in eight minority languages and national sign language.²⁹ However, some ODIHR EOM interlocutors noted that easy-to-read voter education materials were not available and that the CEC's outreach efforts were not replicated in the regions and among vulnerable groups such as voters in remote areas, national minorities and people with disabilities.

The election administration, political parties and civil society should strive to further improve voter education programmes, in particular in regions. Consideration could be given to tailoring initiatives to the needs of national minorities, especially Roma and Egyptians, and voters with disabilities.

Pilot electronic voting took place in the 401 voting centres of Elbasan, Kamëz and Vorë municipalities, covering 310,846 registered voters.³⁰ This was the third pilot organized by the CEC since 2021, comprising a larger number of municipalities and some 8 per cent of all voting centres. The CEC procured an additional 760 electronic voting devices making it a total of 828 used for the 2023 pilot.

In the pilot area, voters cast their ballots using touchscreen voting and counting machines (direct-recording electronic devices) with a paper-audit trail printer, neither of which was connected to the Internet. Voters could verify their vote on a receipt printed by the device. On 18 April, the CEC started simulations in the three municipalities and an online voter education campaign, which continued up to election day.³¹ On 4 May, in line with the law, the CEC also organized public testing of 3 per cent of the devices. The late approval of funds by parliament and the delivery of most voting devices only two months before election day did not allow for substantive voter education and good outreach in remote areas.³² No pre-election audit or certification of the equipment and the software have been conducted, contrary to international good practice.³³

To enhance transparency and increase public confidence, adequate resources should be allocated well in advance to ensure effective preparation and meaningful public independent scrutiny of election technologies.

²⁸ Article 29(a) of the [CRPD](#) obliges the States to ensure that “voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use”. See also Paragraph 34 of [General Comment No. 1 to Article 12 of the CRPD](#).

²⁹ Posters and video spots on voter identification and electoral crimes were also produced in minority languages.

³⁰ Each voting centre was equipped with two voting machines. Paper ballots were available in the CEAZs as a backup in case of the equipment malfunctioning.

³¹ While the demonstration of the e-voting devices helped voters get acquainted with the new mode of voting, remote rural areas did not have equal access to these presentations. The demonstration devices were not equipped with the paper for the receipts' printing, which did not allow voters to simulate all stages of the voting process.

³² Funds were allocated by the government in late January 2023, and the tender was concluded in mid-March.

³³ The Council of Europe [Guidelines on the implementation of the provisions of Recommendation CM/Rec\(2017\)5 on standards for e-voting](#) state that “Public access to the components of the e-voting system and information thereon, in particular documentation, source code and non-disclosure agreements, should be disclosed to the stakeholders and the public at large, well in advance of the election period”. In addition, Section 95 states that “Assessment that e-voting systems function correctly and that security is maintained is essential. The means to achieve this is the independent evaluation or certification of the system as a whole or of its components, which requires disclosure of the critical system elements”.

On election day, the IEOM observed that voters required a heightened level of guidance and assistance to complete voting procedures on the voting devices. In a significant number of instances observed, this compromised the secrecy of the vote.

Authorities should better acquaint voters with election technologies and provide equal access to the voting process. Measures should be introduced to allow voters using new technologies to cast their ballots independently and in full secrecy.

VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens aged 18 years or older on election day are eligible to vote, except for those found incompetent by a court decision based on intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, which is at odds with international obligations prohibiting discrimination based on disability.³⁴ Voting rights are also suspended for citizens serving a prison sentence for committing certain crimes.³⁵

To ensure universal suffrage and equal treatment before the law, restrictions based on intellectual and psychosocial disabilities should be abolished.

Voter registration is passive. Voter lists are extracted from the permanent National Civil Status Register and maintained by the General Directorate of Civil Status (GDSCS) within the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Voters over 100 years of age were automatically removed and had to confirm their records for re-inclusion.³⁶ Voters could check their data in the register and request corrections until 4 April.³⁷ Later and up to 24 hours before election day, voters could request changes to their records via a district court.³⁸ The final voter lists contained 3,650,658 voters, including a significant proportion of voters living abroad, in particular younger citizens.³⁹ Voter lists were displayed at voting centres, and contestants could request their copies for campaign purposes. At times, voter lists were not publicly available at voting centres, which could limit public scrutiny of the voter lists in those areas.⁴⁰

The CEC supervised the voter list compilation process. Two auditors appointed by the CEC in November 2020 assessed the accuracy of the voter lists and did not question their accuracy overall.⁴¹ Following the

³⁴ Article 29 of the [CRPD](#) requires States Parties to “guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others”. See also Paragraph 48 of [General Comment No. 1 to Article 12 of the CRPD](#). Paragraph 7.3 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that OSCE participating States will “guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens”.

³⁵ The Law on Decriminalization suspends the voting rights for committing crimes listed in more than 80 articles of the Criminal Code (ranging from election-related offences to severe crimes).

³⁶ Paragraph 5.9 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states: “All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law”. See also Article 26 of the [ICCPR](#). According to the MoI, of the 3,717 voters over 100 years of age, 3,589 were removed from the voter register and 128 remained on the final voter list.

³⁷ Voters could check their records using the CEC website or online portal at e-albania.al. Only 237 voters requested minor corrections, and 34,184 changed their voting centre location due to residence change.

³⁸ The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that 454 voters were added to the voter lists based on court decisions, following the information submitted by the Prisons Directorate for the prisons in Belsh, Kukës, Lezhë, Tepelenë, Tirana and Vlorë. The CEC approved all requests except for those from Kukës, which arrived too late. A total of 108 voters were added to the voter lists after setting up two additional voting centres.

³⁹ There is no out-of-country voting in Albania. According to a 2020 [report](#) of the Albanian Institute of Statistics (in Albanian), around 1.6 million Albanian citizens live abroad. The CEC estimated in its public briefings that some 40 per cent of the voters reside abroad. The final voter lists included 1,843,278 men and 1,807,380 women.

⁴⁰ In Cërrik, in some locations of Kukës region, in Shkodër and in Tirana, the ODIHR EOM observed that voter lists were not posted on time. In Kukës and in some remote areas in Elbasan region, voter lists were damaged or removed, or posted in a way that did not allow for public scrutiny.

⁴¹ The auditors were nominated by the DP and the SP.

call for elections, the MoI issued an instruction outlining the methodology and key steps for the voter list scrutiny. The first of the six monthly voter list extracts was published on 22 November 2022 and the last one - on 4 April. During this period, respective mayors, in co-ordination with local civil status offices, had to ensure that the number of registered voters per voting centre was within the limits set by the Electoral Code.⁴² On 19 January, shortly before publishing the third extract, the MoI amended the original instruction, specifying additional criteria for assigning voters to voting centres by building code and alphabetically by surname.⁴³

The majority of ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed overall trust in the accuracy of the voter lists, but the ODIHR EOM observed inconsistencies in the distribution of voter notifications by local authorities.⁴⁴ The notifications to voters did not reflect the changes resulting from the reassignment of voters to different voting centres, and only 40 municipalities reported to the CEC that they had distributed notices later in the process.

Authorities should inform all voters about the location of their respective voting centres and consistently display voter lists across all municipalities. Consideration should be given to moving the deadline for notifying voters closer to election day.

Voters were identified on election day through electronic identification devices (EIDs) working offline. These devices contained the voter lists of all voting centres. Voters provided ID cards or biometric passports to verify their identity, and their fingerprints were scanned to confirm their identification.⁴⁵ Once successfully identified, a receipt with personal data and a photo was printed and stored by the VCC for post-election verification. The recruitment of technical operators for voter identification was a challenge for the election administration in some areas, and the CEC had to train the staff closer to election day. The ODIHR EOM positively assessed the training sessions observed. On 5 May, the CEC organized public testing of 3 per cent of the EIDs, but no independent audit of the devices and the software was conducted.⁴⁶ On election day, the EIDs were not used in some 580 voting centres (11 per cent of all voting centres) due to technical malfunctions, lack of technical operators and limited understanding of some procedures related to the maintenance of the devices. While in most cases the EIDs functioned properly, the high share of technical issues confused many VCC members.

Consideration could be given to recruiting and training the technical operators in charge of electronic voter identification in a timely manner. The Central Election Commission should consider conducting an independent audit of the equipment and software before election day.

VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Any eligible voter has the right to stand, except for those whose positions are incompatible with the candidacy, those serving a prison sentence or with a prior conviction for certain categories of crimes or

⁴² Mayors had to group voters according to the boundaries of the voting centres used in previous elections, ensuring that voting centres had no less than 300 and no more than 1,000 registered voters. In case of a mayor's failure, the GDSC may allocate voters to voting centres.

⁴³ Previously, voters were grouped alphabetically by surname.

⁴⁴ Mayors had to send notifications to the voters about their voting centre location not later than 21 January.

⁴⁵ The CEC introduced new criteria for voter identification to prevent possible attempts at impersonation. Voters had up to three attempts to scan thumb and index finger to identify themselves. If this failed, voters had to sign the voters list and the printout from the device to be allowed to vote. According to the MoI, there were some 271,000 voters with expired ID cards. In April, the government extended the validity of expired ID cards for voting purposes, to ensure the participation of the affected voters.

⁴⁶ Sections 7 and 8 of the [2022 Council of Europe Guidelines on the use of information and communication technology \(ICT\) in electoral processes](#) stipulate an independent evaluation and transparency of ICT solutions.

under a search warrant.⁴⁷ The restrictions to the right to stand for citizens whose guilt in committing a crime has not been established by a final court decision are contrary to the principle of presumption of innocence and at odds with international standards.⁴⁸

Restrictions to the right to stand of those whose guilt in committing a crime has not been established by a final court decision should be lifted.

The CEC registered 38 parties and 2 coalitions as electoral subjects eligible to field candidates.⁴⁹ Independent candidates could be nominated by groups of at least nine voters residing in the respective municipality; each group had to be registered by the relevant CEAZ or CEC. Electoral subjects and groups of voters had to submit candidate lists or their nominations to the respective CEAZs or the CEC not later than 25 March.⁵⁰

Parties and groups of voters who did not have parliamentary, mayoral or local council representation for a period of at least six months had to submit support signatures of not less than 1 per cent of voters from the respective municipality. The law limits the maximum number of required support signatures to 3,000 for political parties but not for independent candidates, thus making the registration process more onerous for the latter, especially in Tirana and Durrës.⁵¹ Only four out of the eight parties who had to submit signatures collected them.⁵² Some parties encountered difficulties in their registration.⁵³ Several smaller political parties considered the requirements for documentation in support of candidate lists to be overly burdensome for them.⁵⁴

Considerations should be given to reviewing the threshold for voters' support to ensure the same conditions applicable to independent and party-nominated candidates.

To be registered, candidate lists for municipal councils had to represent women and men equally, with candidates of different genders alternating on the list.⁵⁵ This requirement was not respected or enforced

⁴⁷ The Law on Decriminalization refers to deportation from an EU Member State, Australia, Canada, or the United States of America. It also limits right to stand for citizens convicted for certain crimes, even in the absence of a final court decision, as well as for those under international search warrant. The President of the Republic, judges, prosecutors, military, police and national security officers, diplomatic staff, prefects, members of election commissions, and top-level state administration officials determined by law must resign to be eligible to stand.

⁴⁸ Paragraph 5.19 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states: "Everyone will be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law".

⁴⁹ An electoral subject is a political party, coalition or independent candidate contesting elections. Based on CEC data, three parties and seven groups of voters were denied registration due to incomplete documentation.

⁵⁰ For these elections, 50 of the 92 CEAZs handled registration of candidates. In 11 out of 61 municipalities that included more than one election administration zone, candidates were registered by the CEC.

⁵¹ In the case of Tirana, the number for required signatures for independent candidates was set at 7,000, compared with 3,000 signatures in support of party nominations. According to Paragraph 185 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission 2020 [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#), "Independent candidates should [...] be permitted to run for elections according to the same conditions applicable to candidates nominated by political parties".

⁵² The Conservative Party, Hashtag Initiative, Joint Movement and National Abnrore Alliance collected the required signatures. The Albanian Civic Party, Albanian Homeland Party, the New Democracy Alliance and Party of the Persons with Disabilities registered as electoral subjects but did not collect the required number of signatures in the municipalities where they intended to run.

⁵³ The Joint Movement, which fielded mayoral and councillor candidates in Tirana, was registered as a political party by the Court of Tirana on 2 March. The Commissioner and the CSC deemed the court decision as not final and denied the party registration as an electoral subject. On appeal, the Electoral College ordered the CEC to register the Joint Movement as an electoral subject.

⁵⁴ Contestants had to submit signed copies of the IDs of voters who had signed in their support.

⁵⁵ All parties and coalitions had to submit lists with the number of candidates equal to the number of seats in the respective municipal council, plus one. A candidate may feature only in one list, and the ranking on candidate lists cannot be changed after registration.

in most municipalities.⁵⁶ According to several ODIHR EOM interlocutors, in some areas, women were less willing to run in the elections due to existing stereotypes regarding gender roles, while in certain cases, parties faced difficulties in fielding the required number of women candidates. Overall, women were well represented on candidate lists.

To facilitate women's active participation in public and political life, including at mayoral elections, authorities at all levels should undertake comprehensive legal, institutional and educational efforts to overcome existing gender stereotypes. Political parties should identify and curb any possible gender-based barriers for women candidates, including by reviewing current intra-party practices that hinder more effective representation of women within party structures and as candidates.

The CEC and CEAZs verified candidates' eligibility to stand. Forty-three candidates were still under examination by the Prosecutor General on election day, including five mayoral candidates who were elected.⁵⁷ On 9 June, the CEC sent the file of the elected mayor of Has for investigation.

In a mostly inclusive process, the election administration registered a total of 144 mayoral candidates, including 15 women (10.4 per cent), and 23,763 candidates for municipal councils, including 11,828 women (49.8 per cent).⁵⁸ The SP and the Together We Win coalition (further also Together We Win) were the only electoral subjects to field candidates for both contests in almost all municipalities.⁵⁹

In Himarë and Finiq municipalities (both in the Vlorë region), candidates from ethnic Greek parties were elected as mayors: in Himarë representing the Human Rights Union Party (part of the Together We Win coalition) and in Finiq – from MEGA. Eight women candidates, all representing the SP, were elected as mayors. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors regretted that the selection of candidates was generally done at the central rather than at the local level.

VIII. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The 30-day official campaign period began on 14 April and ended a day before election day. Voters had a distinct choice of contestants, with the local council elections secondary to the mayoral contests. The campaign revolved around the major parties, in particular the ruling SP and the Together We Win coalition. The latter was nominally led by the FP but was in fact dominated by the DPRC, which did not have a formal status of a coalition party but fielded most of the coalition's candidates who were co-opted by the FP.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ The ODIHR EOM noted that in 55 municipalities, at least one candidate list did not comply with the gender quota requirement. For instance, in Kukës eight lists did not comply with the requirement, with some lists having six more men than women, resulting in a total of 37 fewer women candidates. In Kuçovë, nine lists did not respect the gender quota, in Librazhd and Tropojë – seven in each, in Divjakë, Klos, Këlcyrë, Kurbin, Malësi e Madhe and Selenicë - five in each, in Bulqizë, Fushë-Arrëz, Gjirokastër, Has, Krujë, Përmet and Pustec - four lists in each municipality. Some candidate lists also did not comply with the prescribed number of candidates per list.

⁵⁷ The CEC verifies that candidates meet the integrity requirements established by the Law on Decriminalization. If further investigation is necessary, the CEC refers candidates' cases to the Prosecutor General.

⁵⁸ Two independent candidates stood for mayoral posts as did ten independent candidates for local council elections.

⁵⁹ The Together We Win coalition fielded candidates for both contests in all 61 municipalities, and the SP - in 60 mayoral and 61 local council elections. Ten other electoral subjects nominated council candidates in at least half of the municipalities (the Environmentalist Agrarian Party in all municipalities). In addition, the DP contested mayoral elections in 15 municipalities and six other parties - in one municipality each. Nine Roma candidates stood on the candidate lists of various parties contesting local council elections.

⁶⁰ The DPRC fielded 55 of the 61 mayoral candidates and over 900 local councillor candidates.

Fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression were overall respected, and electoral subjects campaigned freely.⁶¹ However, ODIHR EOM interlocutors in several regions claimed that opposition supporters faced intimidation aimed at preventing them from attending the campaign events.⁶² This was compounded by numerous allegations of vote buying or financial inducements for people not to participate in the elections, in most cases allegedly initiated by the SP and its informal ally, the Social Democratic Party.⁶³ On 12 May, a mayoral candidate in Himarë from the Together We Win coalition was detained on the accusation of vote buying.⁶⁴

Authorities should make genuine efforts to raise awareness about the long-standing phenomenon of vote-buying and the risks it poses for the integrity of elections. Public denunciation of such practices before and during the campaign by key stakeholders, including state officials and party leaders, could serve as a potential deterrent.

The campaign was driven by personalities, primarily by the leaders of the main parties, Mr. Rama of the SP and Mr. Berisha of the DPRC, who made regular appearances across the country. While, at times, there was a specific discourse driven by local matters, party leaders and other politicians effectively ran a nationwide campaign, with the SP emphasizing the continuation of infrastructural progress and the opposition focusing on issues of corruption, mismanagement of public funds and migration. The tone of the campaign was mostly moderate, yet, confrontational rhetoric and style, including through billboards and video spots, were present, particularly by the SP.⁶⁵

Overall, the campaign was visible but rather low-key. In Tirana, the ODIHR EOM observed a noticeable presence of outdoor campaign materials promoting parties rather than candidates, with the SP campaign visibly prevalent.⁶⁶ Some interlocutors informed the ODIHR EOM that the space designated for displaying campaign materials was insufficient, making it difficult for new candidates to campaign.⁶⁷ While the Electoral Code significantly limits the use of static campaign materials, such as billboards, the Commissioner decided that this was not within his purview, thus effectively allowing for their display.⁶⁸ The major contestants organized bigger outdoor gatherings while other contesting parties mostly used small-scale meetings, door-to-door visits, posters and social networks. The latter were seen as particularly suitable and effective campaign tools by candidates lacking financial resources.

⁶¹ The ODIHR EOM was aware of two cases of violence. On 11 April, in Vau i Dejës (Shkodër region) a car belonging to a local DPRC leader was blown up. On 19 April, a local SDP leader and local councillor candidate in Shëngjin (Lezhë region) was shot dead. The police did not consider the killing to be connected to the elections.

⁶² The ODIHR EOM received such reports from the regions of Dibër, Durrës, Gjirokastër and Shkodër.

⁶³ The ODIHR EOM received such reports from the regions of Dibër, Durrës, Elbasan, Gjirokastër, Korçë, Lezhë, Shkodër and Tirana. See also *Election Dispute Resolution*.

⁶⁴ The Greek minority candidate was detained several hours after Mr. Rama, in a *Klan TV* show, referred to him as “cheeky”, “ignorant”, “illiterate” person who “hired people to threaten immigrants”.

⁶⁵ Mr. Rama and the SP portrayed Mr. Berisha and Ilir Meta (leader of the FP) as embodiments of a dark past, while the DPRC labelled Mr. Rama and his ministers as “the biggest mafia on the planet”.

⁶⁶ Billboards and posters frequently did not contain the identifying information required by law. On 3 May, the Commissioner requested police to remove such materials by 5 May.

⁶⁷ By law, print materials may be displayed only within five meters from the electoral office of the respective electoral subject or at public places designated for this purpose by the mayors. No such decisions were publicly available on most municipality websites, including for Tirana municipality.

⁶⁸ On 10 May, the Commissioner dismissed a request by the Coalition for Reforms, Integration and Consolidated Institutions (KRIIK) to remove SP billboards in Tirana as the billboards carrying campaign materials were private property officially authorised for advertising by the municipality.

Women candidates featured in most rallies observed by the ODIHR EOM, but their participation in the audience was rather low.⁶⁹ No ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concerns or reported any cases of misogynistic rhetoric, threats, hate speech directed against women politicians, or online harassment against women in the electoral context.

Facebook is the dominant social network in Albania; 28 political parties (out of 44 parties running independently or as part of a coalition) had a *Facebook* account. The DP and SP had the most followers, with some 328,000 and 204,000 followers, respectively. *Facebook* accounts of politicians were much more popular and during the campaign generated the highest activity; 39 party leaders had official *Facebook* accounts, with Mr. Rama having among politicians the highest number of followers (1.62 million) followed by Mr. Berisha (1.12 million). Among the leading politicians, Mr. Rama posted 267 times during the official campaign period and generated the highest number of interactions (2.23 million), while Mr. Berisha had 331 posts with 0.63 million interactions. At the same time, significant campaign activity of Tirana's mayoral candidates was observed on *Instagram* (in particular Erion Veliaj from the SP) and *Tik-Tok* (in particular Belind Këlliçi from the Together We Win coalition).

According to the Electoral Code, the authorities cannot propose or approve decisions providing social benefits to the population within four months before election day and until the formation of a new government. However, the Commissioner publicly stated that the respective provision was only applicable to parliamentary elections.⁷⁰ Such a narrow and formalistic interpretation, reflecting the letter rather than the spirit of the law, did little to guarantee a level playing field.⁷¹

As a result, the national executive took numerous decisions to provide social benefits to the population, which was viewed by several ODIHR EOM interlocutors as a misuse of administrative resources. Besides a 31 March decision to provide a bonus of 5,000 Albanian *Leks* (some EUR 44) to pensioners, the government took over ten decisions in April to increase the salaries of various categories of public employees, such as teachers or firefighters.⁷² In addition, Mr. Rama on several occasions conditioned future government support to municipalities on the election results.⁷³ On 2 May, the DPRC appealed to the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Organized Crime (SPAK) considering those statements as threats and requesting a criminal investigation of such statements made by Mr. Rama throughout the campaign. The ODIHR EOM observed a pattern in all regions where local authorities engaged in extensive activities such as local infrastructure repairs, distribution of food, or offers of short-term employment, including for national minority communities.

⁶⁹ Of the 65 campaign events observed by the ODIHR EOM, women speakers featured in 39. At the same time, estimates of women's participation in the audience varied significantly, from 0 to 90 per cent, with an average of some 30 per cent.

⁷⁰ The Commissioner made this [statement](#) during a press conference on 30 March.

⁷¹ Article 91 of the Electoral Code (Prohibition on the use of administrative resources to support electoral subjects) does not aim to define prohibitions only in relation to parliamentary elections. CEC Regulator Decision No. 9 from December 2020, adopted with the aim to limit potential misuse of administrative resources, stipulates: "[t]he purpose [...] is to establish rules on taking measures, monitoring and preventing prohibited activities, behaviour or use of human, financial and logistical resources of central and local institutions, as well as state administration, during the four months period before election day, aiming to guarantee and ensure impartiality and equal treatment of candidates and political parties [...]".

⁷² EUR 1 is approximately ALL 111 (Albanian *Leks*).

⁷³ On 22 April in Kamëz, while referring to a DPRC mayoral candidate in a derogatory manner, Mr. Rama said that "those who will put the donkey with two long ears in the municipality can forget about the government. Forget about support from the government". In a [Facebook post](#) from 23 April, Mr. Rama presented a project that would be developed in Shkodër and fully financed by the Albanian government and commented: "This is one of the transformative projects for Shkodër, the fate of which is strongly linked to the will of the Shkodër community on 14 May".

Besides Mr. Rama, all but one government ministers, who also did not stand as candidates, prominently participated in the SP campaign, with a different minister for each region of the country. Often, no clear distinction was made between their official and campaign activities. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concerns that the CEC did not react to such type of activities promptly, which further reinforced the SP's advantage during the campaign.⁷⁴ While the CEC imposed sanctions on local administrations for misuse of administrative resources for campaign purposes, sanctions were not applied at the central level of the government.⁷⁵

Legal provisions related to the campaign, including those against misuse of administrative resources, should be reviewed to remove ambiguities and ensure a level playing field. The authorities, including the election administration and law enforcement bodies, should treat all election contestants equally.

The ODIHR EOM received a number of credible reports about cases where municipal employees were told to support or vote for the SP or were warned against supporting the opposition.⁷⁶ On 24 March, the DPRC requested the SPAK to open a criminal investigation concerning the distribution and use of the application 'Aktivist' launched by the SP in 2022. The DPRC alleged that the application is used within the SP-controlled public administration to ensure that subordinate public employees endorse the activities of the SP, its leaders and party-affiliated officials on social networks. The SP publicly denied these claims. ODIHR EOM interlocutors confirmed on various occasions that the application was in use across municipalities and was perceived as a tool to raise and promote the SP's profile on social networks, often upon guidance from relevant SP-affiliated superiors.⁷⁷

Law enforcement bodies should make all efforts to identify and independently investigate all allegations of electoral violations, including vote-buying, pressure on voters and misuse of administrative resources, in a thorough, timely and transparent manner. Voters should be systematically informed about applicable mechanisms for reporting violations, including protection for whistle-blowers and safeguards against repercussions.

IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance is primarily regulated by the Electoral Code in conjunction with the Law on Political Parties which covers regular activities of political parties. The 2020 amendments to the Electoral Code introduced post-election financial compensation for electoral subjects, who did not qualify for state funding before elections, and lowered the threshold from ALL 100,000 to 50,000 for donations to be transferred to special bank accounts. The 2020 amendments partly addressed a prior ODIHR recommendation by expanding the CEC's right to directly verify campaign incomes and expenditures, but recommendations on interim finance reporting and regulation of third-party campaign financing remain unaddressed.

⁷⁴ Article 92.4 of the Electoral Code mandates the CEC to 'prohibit' and publicly announce as such activities abusing administrative resources.

⁷⁵ Sanctions for misuse of administrative resources range from ALL 1,000 to ALL 500,000. In most cases, the CEC applied sanctions between ALL 2,500 and 100,000. The CSC fined at least 16 mayors with up to ALL 100,000 each for illegal campaigning in favour of the SP on the official *Facebook* pages of the municipalities and/or of the mayors.

⁷⁶ The ODIHR EOM received such reports from the regions of Dibër, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Gjirokastër, Korçë, Shkodër and Tirana.

⁷⁷ In 2021, a massive leak of personal data of more than 900,000 residents of Tirana in possession of SP party structures discovered a system of specific party people (*patronazhisti*) in charge of citizens based on their residence. This system of control has allegedly been activated to oversee that citizens are taking part and voting for the SP.

Contestants may finance their campaigns from public and private funds.⁷⁸ Political parties that received at least 1 per cent of the vote nationwide in the last local elections were eligible for public funding for their campaign.⁷⁹ While the Electoral Code prescribes to distribute the funds to political parties not later than five days after the end of the candidate registration period, i.e. by 9 April, parliament allocated these funds (ALL 100 million) on 26 April, 12 days after the beginning of the campaign.⁸⁰ However, some parties informed the ODIHR EOM that they only received the funds on 12 May, which negatively affected the party's ability to use the funds in its campaign. Electoral subjects that do not qualify for public funding may get compensation after the elections.⁸¹ Independent candidates are not entitled to public funding, contrary to international good practice.⁸²

Decisions on the allocation and transfer of public funds to eligible political parties should be taken in a timely manner to ensure effective access to these funds for campaign purposes. Consideration could be given to extending public campaign funding to independent candidates.

Private funds may include contestants' own means, donations from Albanian citizens and legal entities, and bank loans. Individual donations, including in-kind, are capped at ALL 1 million.⁸³ According to the CEC, this limit also applies to electoral subjects who wish to finance the campaign from their own sources. There is no limit on the aggregate amount of donations that a candidate or party may accept.

In 2020, the cap on campaign spending of political parties was lowered from 1,000 to 300 per cent of the highest amount of public funding allocated to a party based on the results of the last local elections.⁸⁴ For these elections, the cap amounted to ALL 128.5 million (some EUR 1.16 million). No interim reporting on campaign incomes or expenses is required by law. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns about the lack of transparency of campaign finance before election day. This limits voters' ability to make an informed choice.⁸⁵

To enhance transparency, there should be periodic public disclosure of financial contributions to a campaign and the expenditure before election day.

The CEC oversees compliance with campaign finance regulations. For these elections, the CEC hired 119 campaign monitors whose presence in the municipalities allowed for the gathering of information

⁷⁸ The law provides for three types of public funding for political parties based on election results: for annual activities, election-related activities and compensation after elections. On 12 April, the CEC distributed ALL 345,341,079 (some EUR 3 million) of annual public funding to 11 parties.

⁷⁹ Paragraph 232 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission 2020 [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) stipulates: “[public] systems of funding should also aim to ensure that all parties, including opposition parties, small parties and new parties, are able to compete in elections in accordance with the principle of equal opportunities, thereby strengthening political pluralism and helping to ensure the proper functioning of democratic institutions”.

⁸⁰ On 22 April, the CEC decided on the distribution of some ALL 97 million to 13 electoral subjects. Thus, the expenditure threshold was only known to contestants eight days after the campaign started.

⁸¹ To qualify for a compensation, a party must obtain not less than 1 per cent of valid votes at the national level.

⁸² Paragraph 185 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission 2020 [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) stipulates: “Where political parties are provided with state support, such as the provision of public media airtime or campaign finance, there should also be a system of support for independent candidates to ensure that they are awarded equitable treatment in the allocation of state resources”.

⁸³ Legal entities that received public procurement funds of more than ALL 10 million, those that have been involved in public partnership projects or have debts to the state budget, as well as those that carry out media-related activities are not allowed to donate towards election campaigns.

⁸⁴ The threshold is kept for independent candidates at 50 per cent.

⁸⁵ According to Paragraph 247 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission 2020 [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#), “Voters must have relevant information as to the financial support given to political parties, as this influences decision making and is a means of holding parties accountable”. See also Paragraph 261.

on campaigning, contributing to overall oversight. The monitors' regular reports did not contain any substantial information on campaign finance.⁸⁶

Contestants are required to submit financial reports within 60 days from the announcement of election results. On 6 May, the CEC decided that political parties, coalitions and mayoral candidates would have to submit financial reports through a new Online Financial Reporting System, facilitating reporting, disclosure, access to financial information and improving transparency of campaign finance. The CEC should appoint auditors to review these financial reports and publish auditors' reports 30 days after their submission. In April 2021, the CEC Regulator defined the deadlines for publishing the campaign finance reports: by the CEC - within two days after receiving the relevant report, and by electoral subjects – within three days after the submission.

The law provides for a wide range of sanctions against campaign finance violations, including fines ranging from ALL 50,000 to ALL 5,000,000, forfeiture of public funds and suspension of public financing for up to five years. No ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concern about the proportionality and effectiveness of these sanctions.

X. MEDIA

A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The Albanian media landscape is diverse, with a variety of media outlets operating in a limited advertising market.⁸⁷ Online media consumption is continuously increasing and has replaced print media. However, television (TV) remains the main source of political information.⁸⁸ The most popular online outlets are linked to the main TV stations and reproduce their content.

Several systemic problems impact media freedom and journalism, leading to an erosion of media independence due to the concentration of media ownership and the control exerted by intertwined business and political interests.⁸⁹ Both factors affect the editorial autonomy of the media and make journalists vulnerable to pressure from media owners and politicians and self-censorship.⁹⁰

Discrediting rhetoric by politicians, obstacles to accessing public information and precarious working conditions are other major factors affecting media professionals and the ability of the main media to conduct independent and investigative reporting.⁹¹

⁸⁶ According to the reporting form, the CEC's monitors submit information on electoral offices, campaign materials, campaign activities/events and use of state resources, but they are not required to calculate or estimate the total expenditures incurred by electoral subjects. According to the relevant CEC regulation, monitors have to submit interim reports to the CEC every ten days, and the final report - seven days after election day.

⁸⁷ The absence of a broadly accepted media audience measurement mechanism poses further challenges to fair competition and financing of the media.

⁸⁸ See [IPSOS Strategic Marketing Opinion Poll Results on Media Trust](#) from March 2021.

⁸⁹ UN HRC [General Comment No. 34](#) to the ICCPR in Paragraph 40 states: "States parties should take appropriate action, consistent with the Covenant, to prevent undue media dominance or concentration by privately controlled media groups in monopolistic situations that may be harmful to a diversity of sources and views".

⁹⁰ The EU [Albania 2022 Report](#) notes: "High-profile business group have increased their economic penetration in the media market [...]. Media organizations and activists have continued to raise concerns about the use of media channels to promote owners' economic interests and political agendas. Market and audience concentration and lack of transparency of media funding continue to remain issues of concern as regards media freedom in the country".

⁹¹ See also Subchapter Freedom of Expression (p.29-32) of the [Albania 2022 Report by the European Commission](#).

State authorities should promote an independent and genuinely diverse media environment that is free from political and corporate influence. Parliament should amend the Law on Audiovisual Media to limit the concentration of media ownership in the broadcasting sector and introduce measures to prevent undue influence of media owners over editorial policies.

There is a widespread practice among the main political parties and public institutions to provide media with pre-recorded or live footage of political and campaign events. This footage is widely used by broadcasters in their programming, including in the news, often without proper labelling.⁹² All ODIHR EOM media interlocutors noted that this practice significantly affects editorial independence, as media heavily rely on such materials, rather than produce their own content (see also *Media Monitoring Findings*).⁹³

The use by media of material produced by parties or state authorities in news and information programmes should be avoided or limited to exceptional cases, particularly during election campaigns. Whenever aired, such material should be clearly identified as content produced by political contestants as required by law. Sanctions should be in place and enforced for violations related to identification requirements.

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution protects media freedom and the right to information and prohibits censorship. However, legal provisions concerning access to information are not adequately implemented and authorities tend to centralize access to public data. According to most ODIHR EOM interlocutors, the new Media and Information Agency, created in September 2021 with the stated aim of facilitating access to information, has further centralized access to public information. Several journalists informed the ODIHR EOM about the low response rate by institutions, which do not respect the deadlines for sending requested information, thus making news obsolete or devoid of supporting documents.⁹⁴ In addition, defamation remains a criminal offence punishable by heavy fines.⁹⁵

The authorities should ensure proper implementation of the Law on the Right to Information, decriminalize defamation and support independent journalism.

Broadcasters are regulated by the Law on Audiovisual Media. In April 2023, parliament approved amendments to harmonize it with the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors noted that the reform did not tackle key issues such as transparency of media ownership, co-regulation, self-regulation and pluralism of media but only addressed non-controversial issues.

Electronic media are overseen by the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) which has the power to issue and withdraw licenses and sanction broadcasters with fines or suspend their broadcasting rights. Several

⁹² The Electoral Code requires that the party-produced materials be clearly labelled as such.

⁹³ According to Paragraph 26 of the [1991 OSCE Moscow Document](#), “The participating States reaffirm the right to freedom of expression, including the right to communication and the right of the media to collect, report and disseminate information, news and opinions”. See also Paragraph 9.1 the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#).

⁹⁴ Paragraph 19 of UN HRC [General Comment No. 34](#) to the ICCPR states: “To give effect to the right of access to information, States parties should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest. States parties should make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to such information”.

⁹⁵ The Criminal Code provides for fines up to ALL 3 million for defamation. The ODIHR EOM is aware of two cases of defamation initiated during this election campaign. On 18 April, MP Monika Kryemadhi (Freedom Party) [filed a civil lawsuit](#) against *Top Channel* and announced a future criminal lawsuit. On 3 April, mayor of Tirana Veliaj filed a [criminal complaint](#) for defamation against *Syri TV* and the journalist and producer of the investigative show “*Piranjat*”. On 22 May, media [reported](#) that Mr. Veliaj withdrew the lawsuit. One of the journalists involved accused the mayor of Tirana of using the lawsuit as a means of intimidation at the peak of the election campaign.

ODIHR EOM interlocutors consider that AMA is not sufficiently equipped to fulfil its media oversight mandate and questioned its independence.⁹⁶

Campaign coverage in the broadcast media is regulated by the Electoral Code. The rules for allocating coverage in news and information programmes provide the main parliamentary parties with a significant advantage.⁹⁷ The stringent provisions regulating the allocation of airtime to electoral subjects were criticized by several media interlocutors of the ODIHR EOM. This system is inequitable to smaller parties and contradicts OSCE commitments and international good practice.⁹⁸

The Electoral Code rules for the allocation of airtime to election contestants should be amended to reduce the advantage to the main parliamentary parties in editorial programming and to ensure a more equitable allocation of time for all contesting parties.

Provisions for free-of-charge airtime on the public broadcaster Albanian Radio-Television (RTSH) ensure visibility for all election contestants also based on their parliamentary representation.⁹⁹ Paid election advertising in broadcast media is subject to several restrictions.¹⁰⁰ Transparency measures to ensure equal opportunities are in place for TV and radio channels, which must submit information about the fees they charge to the CEC. However, on the CEC website, price lists were published for 20 broadcasters only, although more channels aired election advertisements without filing the required information. Some of the outlets offered what amounted to public-relations services, with the corresponding tariffs.¹⁰¹ The requirements regarding paid advertisement do not apply to online media. This legal gap was criticized by many ODIHR EOM interlocutors who expressed concerns about the lack of measures addressing transparency and targeting of online electoral ads.

AMA oversees broadcasters' compliance with the legal requirements for campaign coverage. The media authority fulfilled its monitoring mandate and provided the CEC with daily and periodic reports on campaign coverage in the media, which were published on the CEC website. The reports indicated that most of the breaches concerned failure to provide recordings of the aired material to AMA, as well as infringements related to the political advertisement.¹⁰² Based on AMA's findings, the CEC imposed several sanctions against broadcasters for identified violations, generally in line with AMA's

⁹⁶ Under the law, [AMA](#) is required to be politically independent. In July 2021, the Media Freedom Rapid Response [expressed concern](#) about the impartiality and independence of AMA following the election of a close associate of the SP as the regulator's chairperson. The [European Union](#) and the [OSCE](#) called to postpone the appointment until the convocation of the new parliament in September 2021. Media organizations stressed that that choice appeared to be in contradiction with the [recommendation of the Venice Commission](#) for strengthening AMA's independence.

⁹⁷ Parties that won over 20 per cent of seats in the last parliamentary elections should receive twice as much coverage in news and information programmes than other parliamentary parties. Coverage of non-parliamentary parties is at the discretion of the broadcasters but may not exceed the coverage provided to parliamentary parties with less than 20 per cent of seats.

⁹⁸ Paragraph 7.8 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) requires States to "provide that no legal or administrative obstacle stands in the way of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings and individuals wishing to participate in the electoral process". Paragraph 8.5 of the 2008 [PACE Resolution No. 1636](#) highlights that "political parties and candidates must have fair and equal access to the media".

⁹⁹ [CEC Decision No. 352](#) (in Albanian) provided for 50 minutes on public TV and 30 minutes on public radio to the SP and the DP; other parliamentary parties were entitled to 25 minutes each on TV and 15 minutes on radio, and non-parliamentary parties each were entitled to 10 minutes on TV and on radio. Free airtime was allocated on *RTSH-2*, which has a smaller viewership and is mainly focused on national minorities and marginalized groups.

¹⁰⁰ Electoral subjects have the right to buy political advertisement on TV and radio, and limits are set for the total amount of airtime that can be purchased. Broadcasters must apply the same fees for the same time slot, and campaign advertisement may only be broadcast from 15.00 to 18.00 and from 21.00 to 24.00.

¹⁰¹ Several TV stations offered paid services for inviting politicians and candidates as guests in studio, interview of candidates, participation in talk shows, etc.

¹⁰² Most violations related to airing advertisements during forbidden timeslots. Two channels exceeded the 90 minutes limit allowed for election advertising.

recommendations.¹⁰³ Imbalances in media coverage were also found, with the CEC requesting broadcasters to ensure compensation for under-represented parties. However, some broadcasters did not comply with the respective CEC decisions.

Due to outdated equipment and technical and material limitations, AMA monitoring focused on airtime allocation only and did not record other elements of the coverage, including the labelling of party-produced material and the tone of reporting. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors referred to the AMA reports as not clear in terms of the data presented.

Audiovisual Media Authority should be provided with sufficient material and technical resources to enhance its media monitoring and reporting capacity.

C. MEDIA MONITORING FINDINGS [Click Here to Read Media Monitoring Results](#)



ODIHR EOM media monitoring results show that campaign coverage mainly focused on national party leaders as well as the candidates for mayor of Tirana, while other contestants received little attention.¹⁰⁴ Whereas 51 per cent of the overall airtime was dedicated to political actors who were not candidates, 28 per cent was dedicated to Tirana mayoral candidates and 21 per cent - to candidates in other municipalities. Only 9 per cent of the coverage was devoted to women candidates. The media campaign was characterized by recurrent personal attacks among politicians and the absence of debates among contestants. Candidates and the media paid limited attention to policies and issues relevant at the local level. Only 22 per cent of the monitored coverage was devoted to substantial policy issues. Broadcasters largely resorted to what appeared to be pre-recorded party material, rarely labelled, in their news programmes, falling short of providing comprehensive and objective coverage of the campaign. Some 38 per cent of monitored news coverage was either confirmed or likely to be party-produced material. Only 5 per cent of such material was labelled in line with the Electoral Code.

Campaign coverage in all monitored media focused mainly on the SP (40 per cent), Together We Win (37 per cent) and to a lesser extent on the DP (15 per cent). Together, they received 92 per cent of the total campaign coverage monitored. In its news and information programmes, *RTSH* allotted the largest amount of airtime to the SP (43 per cent) and to Together We Win (35 per cent), while the DP received 17 per cent. On *TV Klan*, the SP received 39 per cent, Together We Win - 35 per cent and the DP - 21 per cent of coverage. *Top Channel* devoted 51 per cent to the SP, while Together We Win and the DP were allotted 32 and 6 per cent of campaign coverage, respectively. Together We Win received the highest share of coverage on *Vizion Plus* (40 per cent), followed by the SP (33 per cent) and the DP (16 per cent). *A2 CNN* also focused its coverage on the SP (41 per cent), Together We Win (40 per cent) and the DP (16 per cent). The tone of the coverage was mostly neutral or positive in all monitored TVs, except for *Top Channel*, which provided the SP with above-average positive exposure (29 per cent) and gave slightly negative coverage of Together We Win (7 per cent).

XI. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The Electoral Code provides an adequate framework for the resolution of election disputes, with an elaborate administrative complaint procedure and due process guarantees. By law, contestants whose legal interests are affected can appeal CEAZ decisions to the CEC, within three days from the

¹⁰³ In its periodic reports, AMA proposed sanctions for breaches observed for the CEC's consideration.

¹⁰⁴ From 14 April to 14 May, the ODIHR EOM carried out prime-time monitoring on five TV stations: public *RTSH-1* and private *Top Channel*, *TV Klan*, *Vizion Plus* and *A2 CNN*.

announcement of the decision.¹⁰⁵ While observers may only appeal the denial of their accreditation, and voters may lodge complaints concerning their inclusion in the voter list, any legal or natural person has the right to complain against election-related offences to the Commissioner.¹⁰⁶

Decisions of the Commissioner and CEAZs may be appealed to the CSC.¹⁰⁷ Decisions of the CSC and CEC Regulator can be appealed to the Electoral College, whose decisions are final.¹⁰⁸ The CSC has a two-day deadline, and the Electoral College has ten days to decide on complaints or appeals received. Both instances have ten days to decide on cases pertaining to election results.¹⁰⁹ Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns regarding what they perceived as biased decision-making of the CSC, thus challenging the perception of impartiality of this body.¹¹⁰ In some cases, the CSC took contradictory decisions, failing to create a consistent interpretation of the law.¹¹¹ In some cases, the main argument to dismiss a complaint was the lack of a quorum of the CSC, thus leaving plaintiffs without effective legal remedy contrary to OSCE commitments and good international practice.¹¹²

To ensure legal certainty and an effective legal remedy, the Complaints and Sanctions Commission should ensure uniform decision-making, avoiding inconsistent legal reasoning.

Before election day, the CEC received 438 reports from civil society organizations (CSOs) and electoral subjects on alleged non-reporting of public activities by state and municipal institutions within four months before election day, misuse of administrative resources and other campaign-related offences. The Commissioner addressed most of these reports by requesting the CSC to impose sanctions or issued notifications to public bodies. The CSC adjudicated 49 cases, mostly concerning candidate registration, misuse of administrative resources and other campaign-related offences, and imposed sanctions in 17 cases of misuse of administrative resources and other campaign-related offences, with sanctions varying between ALL 2,500 and 100,000.¹¹³ Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors considered sanctions of

¹⁰⁵ Complaints that do not meet the formal requisites can be resubmitted with corrections within 24 hours.

¹⁰⁶ Such complaints are investigated by the Commissioner, who may address to the CSC to impose sanctions. The review of administrative sanctions or imposition of disciplinary measures by the CSC is done within 30 days, but not later than 6 months. Complainants who are not electoral subjects may appeal the decision of the CSC to the administrative courts.

¹⁰⁷ According to the CSC rules of procedure, following the registration of a complaint, lots are drawn to appoint a rapporteur from among the CSC members, who verifies whether a complaint is admissible. If a complaint is accepted, a public hearing must take place between 24 and 48 hours.

¹⁰⁸ The Electoral College consists of eight judges from first instance and appeal courts, appointed by lottery for a four-year term. Seven of these judges are women. Cases are reviewed by a panel of five judges.

¹⁰⁹ Complaints concerning election results may be lodged within five days from adopting the decision in question.

¹¹⁰ The CSC in its current composition includes lawyers, senior public officials and legal experts. One of the members was a senior government and political party official. All five current members of the CSC are men.

¹¹¹ In its Decision No. 45 of 4 April, the CSC concluded that the provisions of Article 91.1 of the Electoral Code are ambiguous because the period of the prohibition to use administrative resources is not determined. The CSC ruled that the prohibition is applied only during the 30-day official election campaign period, disregarding the fact that a four-month period is indicated in Regulator Decision No. 9 (see Articles 3.1.3.a and 3.2). In this particular case, on 7 February, the Minister of Health and Social Protection together with the Minister of Justice and the mayor of Lezha visited the Regional Hospital of Lezha. On 8 February, the information about this visit was posted on the *Facebook* profile of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, thus promoting the incumbent mayor who was running for re-election. The CSC did not impose a fine on the Ministry of Health and Social Protection because the offence was committed outside of the 30-day official campaign period.

¹¹² Paragraph 5.10 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document commits participating States to provide everyone with “effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity”. Section II.3.3.b of the [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) recommends that “The procedure must be simple and devoid of formalism, in particular concerning admissibility of appeals”. On 2 May, the CSC took the decision to dismiss a complaint by the FP because of lack of quorum of three CSC members to adopt a decision, even though four CSC members had provided their arguments earlier in the session. This decision was subsequently overturned by the Electoral College, and on 10 May the CSC took a new decision.

¹¹³ Municipalities and state institutions filed six appeals against decisions on sanctions to the Electoral College.

ALL 2,500 as too low and not dissuasive. The CSC adjudicated complaints in public sessions, with the participation of the parties to the case. At times, the CSC sessions were announced only a few hours before or were held without prior notification.¹¹⁴ Several CSC decisions made before election day were only published after election day.¹¹⁵ Some 75 complaints about election-related offences were not resolved by 14 May.

The CEC received 44 complaints on election day; some of them alleging campaign violations, and addressed those after election day. On 15 and 18 May, the CSC dealt with four requests by the Commissioner to impose sanctions regarding misuse of administrative resources and display of campaign material and upheld three of them.

Before election day, the Electoral College adjudicated 15 appeals, all within legal deadlines and in public sessions. In three cases, appealed decisions of the CSC were overturned. The decisions of the Electoral College were well-reasoned and some provisions of the Electoral Code were interpreted to ensure the protection of suffrage rights, which contributed to legal certainty.¹¹⁶ However, some decisions were published on the website of the court with significant delays of one to three weeks.

Between 15 and 24 May, the Electoral College considered six appeals against administrative sanctions imposed for misuse of administrative resources while promoting the SP. One appeal was dismissed because the plaintiff (Shijak municipality) had no legal standing, and three cases were terminated as the representatives of the plaintiffs were not present. One case was redirected to the Administrative Court of Tirana as the plaintiff was not an electoral subject.¹¹⁷ The last appeal, regarding a fine of ALL 100,000 imposed by the CSC against the mayor of Elbasan, was considered on merits and dismissed. After the adjudication, information regarding the parties to the cases, short descriptions of the cases and the results were uploaded on the website of the court.

The Central Election Commission should consider all complaints and appeals in a timely manner and be properly prepared and resourced to do so. To ensure transparency all decisions on election disputes should be published promptly and accessible to all.

The ODIHR EOM was informed that before election day, police offices across the country had received and investigated 54 reports on election-related offences, including 25 cases of vote-buying and 20 cases of selling votes. The State Police also identified five electoral crimes during election day. Electoral violations related to corruption are prosecuted by SPAK which received 13 election-related reports and launched 6 pre-trial criminal investigations before election day, including 4 cases regarding vote-buying. On election day, SPAK received 21 reports from electoral subjects and citizens.

XII. ELECTION OBSERVATION

The Electoral Code provides for citizen and international observation of all stages of the electoral process. CSOs specialized or engaged in the area of good governance and democratization, media and party representatives can be accredited to observe. In an inclusive process, the CEC accredited 452 citizen observers from 9 CSOs and 557 observers from 16 international organizations and 15 embassies, as well

¹¹⁴ For example, on 22 May, the CSC held a session without prior notification. All information regarding adopted decisions was provided to the parties of the case via email after the session.

¹¹⁵ For example, decisions of the CSC adopted on 13 May (Nos. 92, 94, 103 and 111) were published on 18 May.

¹¹⁶ In the case of Hashtag Initiative/Kosta Garo vs. the CEC, on 13 April, the Electoral College ruled that non-registration of the candidate due to alleged lack of documentation was against the constitutional principle of pluralism and the right to be elected.

¹¹⁷ By law, only electoral subjects may appeal to the Electoral College.

as 33 local media outlets with 1,114 media representatives. The CEAZs accredited party observers in their respective areas.

Parliamentary parties and coalitions have permanent representatives at the CEC. Other electoral subjects may appoint representatives for the electoral period. Once registered, electoral subjects may appoint one observer to the CEAZs and VCCs in the area where they are running and observe the activities of each counting team in the respective BCCs. Coalitions, regardless of the number of parties that are part of it, can delegate up to three representatives per commission or counting team.

Citizen observers were present in 6 per cent of the voting centres and 37 per cent of the BCCs observed by the IEOM, while party observers were present in 86 and 97 per cent, respectively.

Various CSOs monitored the use of administrative resources and compliance with campaign regulations and filed their reports in cases of violations to the CEC.¹¹⁸ Several CSOs informed the ODIHR EOM that due to limited financial resources, they only deployed a small number of observers on election day.

XIII. ELECTION DAY

Election day was generally peaceful but was negatively affected by numerous cases of party interference in the process as well as by technical and procedural problems. In a few cases, the IEOM was not allowed to observe the voting and counting processes.¹¹⁹ The CEC announced a voter turnout of 38.23 per cent of all registered voters, including those residing abroad.

A. OPENING AND VOTING

The opening process was assessed negatively in 40 of the 101 voting centres observed. The IEOM observed problems with the set-up and functioning of EIDs, in some cases due to the EID operator not reporting for work (26 reports), the VCC not showing to all present that the ballot boxes were empty (24 reports), and the record of sealing not deposited in the ballot boxes (10 reports). In 17 voting centres observed, non-VCC members, often party observers and activists, interfered during the opening. Two-thirds of voting centres observed opened for voting with a delay of more than 15 minutes and seven with more than one hour delay.

Voting was assessed negatively in 7 per cent of observations, which is of concern. Voting centres observed in urban areas were assessed less negatively (4 per cent negative assessments) than in rural areas (10 per cent negative assessments).¹²⁰ Such assessments related to procedural problems, the presence of unauthorized people, the layout of voting centres being not conducive to maintaining the secrecy of the vote, as well as cases of group, proxy and assisted voting. In rural areas, the IEOM observed group voting in 20 per cent of voting centres observed, as opposed to 5 per cent in urban areas.

In 11 per cent of voting centres visited, the IEOM observed people other than VCC members keeping track of voters casting ballots, the practice being more common in urban areas (observed in 16 per cent of voting centres visited) than in rural areas (5 per cent). Unauthorized people, usually party activists, were present in 4 per cent of voting centres observed, and in 6 per cent, people other than VCC members, mostly party observers and activists, interfered in or directed the voting process. Tension or unrest were

¹¹⁸ These CSOs included KRIIK, the Albanian Helsinki Committee and Civic Resistance.

¹¹⁹ Such cases were reported from CEAZs 18, 52 and 82.

¹²⁰ Some 54 per cent of voting centres observed by the IEOM were in urban areas. In the regions of Lezhë, Korçë and Tirana, the IEOM assessed the voting process most negatively, and in Gjirokastër and Dibër - most positively.

reported outside of 2 per cent of voting centres observed, and inside – 2 per cent. Campaign materials or activities were noted in the vicinity of 3 per cent of voting centres observed. The IEOM observed cases of intimidation of voters in 1 per cent of voting centres visited. Party and citizen observers were present in 86 and 6 per cent of voting centres observed, respectively; in a few instances, citizen observers appeared to be representing the interests of a political party.

The EIDs were not functioning or the EID operator had not reported for work in 9 per cent of voting centres observed. In 20 per cent of voting centres observed where the EIDs worked, not every voter could be identified by the EID. Inking procedures, an important safeguard against multiple voting, were not always followed: in 27 per cent of voting centres observed, not all voters were checked for traces of indelible ink, and in 11 per cent, not all voters were marked with ink before voting. In 30 per cent of voting centres observed, one or more persons who were not on the voter list were turned away or redirected to a correct voting centre.¹²¹

Voting procedures were generally respected, but in 10 per cent of voting centres, the IEOM observed that not all voters marked their ballots in secret, more often in rural areas (14 per cent of observations) compared with 6 per cent in urban areas.¹²² The IEOM also observed a number of procedural violations, including group voting (12 per cent) and proxy voting (3 per cent). In 3 per cent of voting centres visited, the IEOM observed attempts to influence voters for whom to vote, and also in 3 per cent, the same person assisting more than one voter, in violation of the law. In the limited number of voting centres with electronic voting, the IEOM observed that frequently (15 out of 41 observations), in particular elderly voters, had problems using the voting machines and that the assistance rendered to these voters undermined the secrecy of the vote.

To ensure the secrecy of the vote and to prevent intimidation of voters, group and proxy voting, the authorities should enforce effective procedural safeguards.

The IEOM observed that the ballot boxes were not properly sealed in 1 per cent of voting centres visited, and in 5 per cent, the serial numbers of ballot box seals had not been recorded in the VCC Meeting Record Book. Almost 6 per cent of voting centres observed were overcrowded, and in 5 per cent, the layout was not adequate to conduct voting. In 3 per cent of voting centres observed, the IEOM assessed negatively the adherence to established procedures and voters' understanding of the procedures. Some 60 per cent of voting centres observed were not independently accessible for people with physical disabilities, and in 28 per cent, the layout was not suitable for such voters.¹²³

Local authorities and the election administration should strengthen their efforts to ensure the accessibility of voting centres for people with disabilities and to improve their independent access to the electoral process.

B. CLOSING AND COUNTING

Closing was assessed positively in all but 8 of the 100 voting centres observed, with procedures followed in almost all of them. In eight cases the IEOM noted that understanding of procedures by the VCCs was limited, and the VCC's performance was assessed negatively in five cases. The receipt of election material in 55 of the 58 BCCs where it was observed by the IEOM was assessed positively. Procedures

¹²¹ The CEC relocated 29 voting centres close to election day due to unsuitable locations or unfinished repairs. According to the CEC, some 174,000 voters were redirected to another voting centre on election day.

¹²² Paragraph 7.4 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) requires the OSCE participating States to “ensure that votes are cast by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedure”.

¹²³ In rural areas, the share of voting centres observed that were not independently accessible for people with physical disabilities was 68 per cent, compared with 53 per cent in urban areas.

were followed, but in one-fifth of the BCCs observed, overcrowding was noted or the reception venue was not adequate for the delivery of materials.

The vote count was observed in 80 BCCs. In some 8 per cent of the 347 observations, the IEOM assessed the counting negatively. In most cases, the IEOM observed that the counting was slow but professional and methodical, and transparency was, at times, limited. The IEOM also observed overcrowding and, in some cases, faced difficulty following the counting process through the designated video screens as ballots were not displayed consistently to the camera. Tension was reported from five BCCs, and interference by party activists - from two. Party observers were present in almost all observed counts and citizen observers - in more than one-third.

The IEOM observed cases where counting teams did not follow all prescribed reconciliation procedures, especially in cases where the VCC Record of Closing was not found in the ballot box. The IEOM observed cases where the stamped reverse side of the ballots was not properly exposed to the camera (28 reports) and instances where the determination of ballot validity was not reasonable or consistent (six and eight reports, respectively). In 27 counts observed, the number of ballots found in the ballot box did not match the number of voters who had received ballots, and in 18 counts observed, the number of ballots found in the ballot box did not equal the sum of valid and invalid ballots. In 28 instances, recounts were required, and in 2 instances, the request for a recount was denied. The IEOM observed 36 cases where voting results protocols had to be corrected. In 13 observations, members of counting teams left during the count, and the vote count was interrupted in 19 cases. The IEOM observed that members of counting teams could not agree on the validity of ballots during 13 counts observed, and in 8 cases party observers were not allowed to contest ballots. In addition, 46 reports stated that the reasons for contesting ballots were not properly reflected on the reverse side of these ballots. In 78 observations, party observers were not given copies of the voting results protocols. Contrary to previous ODIHR recommendations, citizen and international observers were not provided with voting results protocols.

To enhance the transparency of the electoral process and contribute to public trust, all observers should be entitled to copies of the voting results protocols.

Due to the workload and physical exhaustion, the counting teams interrupted the counting in most BCCs observed, despite the legal requirement and the Commissioner's orders for uninterrupted counting. In Kurbin municipality, the CEC suspended counting due to tension between a party observer and a counting team member.

C. TABULATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS

The counting was finalized on 17 May, and the Commissioner approved the first aggregate results table on 18 May.¹²⁴ Most election results for the mayoral races were approved by the CEAZs on 16 May, while those for the local councils were further delayed. Eight ballot boxes were declared irregular following CSC decisions.¹²⁵ The CEC started posting preliminary mayoral voting results from the voting centres which were part of the electronic voting pilot project at around 20.40 on election day, and at around 23.00 from other municipalities, contributing to transparency. All aggregate tables of results were approved by the CEC by 26 May, following the correction of results tables of Elbasan and Kamëz municipalities, where discrepancies had been identified in some protocols.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ The first election results were approved for the municipalities of Belsh for mayor and Rrogozhinë for mayor and local council. In both municipalities, CEAZ members could not reach a decision on the election results.

¹²⁵ Among ballot boxes declared irregular, two were in CEAZ 27 in Kamëz, one in mayoral election in CEAZ 58 (Fier), and one for municipal councils in each of CEAZ 15 (Kurbin), CEAZ 19 (Dibër) and CEAZ 22 (Durrës).

¹²⁶ The final results for these municipalities were not affected by these corrections.

As of 22 May, the CSC had received 11 appeals against CEAZ decisions approving the election results in the Belsh, Dibër, Kuçovë, Memaliaj, Pukë and Tropojë municipalities. On 23 May, the CSC rejected the appeal of the Legality Movement party against election results in Dibër municipality. On 26 May, the CSC rejected the appeals of the Together We Win coalition and the Demo-Christian Alliance Party regarding the election results in the Krujë and Gjirokastrë municipalities, respectively. On 29 May, the CSC also rejected appeals of the Progressive Alliance Party and the Demo-Christian Alliance Party regarding the election results in the Kurbin and Kamëz municipalities, respectively. The CSC adjudicated complaints in public sessions, with the participation of the parties to the cases. The decisions were reasoned, either referring to a lack of evidence or confirming the legality of the counting processes.

Following the approval of the election results in Rogozhinë municipality, on 23 May, the mayoral candidate of the Together We Win coalition appealed the results to the CSC, claiming manipulations.¹²⁷ On 6 June, the CSC, upon the request of two of its members, ordered recounts of votes in all voting centres in the municipality; as a result, the difference between the SP and Together We Win candidates decreased from 30 to 21 votes.¹²⁸ The Together We Win coalition and its mayoral candidate further appealed the case to the Electoral College, which, on 15 June, cancelled the CSC decision, annulled the results of the mayoral elections in Rogozhinë and ordered repeat mayoral elections for 23 July. The Electoral College dismissed the appeal of Together We Win in the case of Belsh municipality, where the coalition had made similar claims.

XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations, as contained throughout the text, are offered with a view to enhance the conduct of elections in Albania and to support efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with prior ODIHR recommendations which remain to be addressed.¹²⁹ ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of Albania to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Law enforcement bodies should make all efforts to identify and independently investigate all allegations of electoral violations, including vote-buying, pressure on voters and misuse of administrative resources, in a thorough, timely and transparent manner. Voters should be systematically informed about applicable mechanisms for reporting violations, including protection for whistle-blowers and safeguards against repercussions.
2. Authorities should make genuine efforts to raise awareness about the long-standing phenomenon of vote-buying and the risks it poses for the integrity of elections. Public denunciation of such practices

¹²⁷ The Together We Win coalition appealed the election results, claiming that those voters registered in the voting centre in Rogozhinë prison were not eligible to vote, challenging the validity of the voter list in this instance and alleging violations in other voting centres.

¹²⁸ See [CSC Decision No. 174 of 6 June](#).

¹²⁹ According to Paragraph 25 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#), OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations”. The follow-up of prior recommendations is assessed by ODIHR as follows: recommendation 18 from [the final report on the 2019 local elections](#) (2019 Final report) and recommendations 6 and 8 from [the final report on the 2021 parliamentary elections](#) (2021 Final report) are fully implemented. Recommendations 5, 6, 8, 11 and 14 from the 2019 final report and recommendations 7 and 21 from the 2021 final report are mostly implemented. Recommendations 1-4, 7, 12, 13 15 and 20 from the 2019 final report and recommendations 2, 3, 9, 10, 16, 19 and 23 from the 2021 final report are partially implemented. See also the [ODIHR Electoral Recommendations Database](#).

before and during the campaign by key stakeholders, including state officials and party leaders, could serve as a potential deterrent.

3. To ensure the secrecy of the vote and to prevent intimidation of voters, group and proxy voting, the authorities should enforce effective procedural safeguards.
4. To ensure a comprehensive and consistent electoral framework, all decision-making entities, including parliament, its political parties and other electoral stakeholders, should commit to meaningful electoral reform and address all ODIHR recommendations.
5. Legal provisions related to the campaign, including those against misuse of administrative resources, should be reviewed to remove ambiguities and ensure a level playing field. The authorities, including the election administration and law enforcement bodies, should treat all election contestants equally.
6. The authorities should ensure proper implementation of the Law on the Right to Information, decriminalize defamation and support independent journalism.
7. In line with previous ODIHR recommendations and to ensure the stability of the election administration, consideration should be given to reviewing the system of nominating members and secretaries of the lower-level election administration. Measures should be introduced to exclude arbitrary replacements of members of the election administration.
8. The use by media of material produced by parties or state authorities in news and information programmes should be avoided or limited to exceptional cases, particularly during election campaigns. Whenever aired, such material should be clearly identified as content produced by political contestants as required by law. Sanctions should be in place and enforced for violations related to identification requirements.

B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Legal Framework

9. Sub-legal acts regulating the electoral process should be adopted in a timely manner to ensure legal certainty, effective preparation and public understanding.

Election Administration

10. The election administration, political parties and civil society should strive to further improve voter education programmes, in particular in regions. Consideration could be given to tailoring initiatives to the needs of national minorities, especially Roma and Egyptians, and voters with disabilities.
11. To enhance transparency and increase public confidence, adequate resources should be allocated well in advance to ensure effective preparation and meaningful public independent scrutiny of election technologies.
12. Authorities should better acquaint voters with election technologies and provide equal access to the voting process. Measures should be introduced to allow voters using new technologies to cast their ballots independently and in full secrecy.

13. Local authorities and the election administration should strengthen their efforts to ensure the accessibility of voting centres for people with disabilities and to improve their independent access to the electoral process.

Voter Registration

14. To ensure universal suffrage and equal treatment before the law, restrictions based on intellectual and psychosocial disabilities should be abolished.
15. Authorities should inform all voters about the location of their respective voting centres and consistently display voter lists across all municipalities. Consideration should be given to moving the deadline for notifying voters closer to election day.
16. Consideration could be given to recruiting and training the technical operators in charge of electronic voter identification in a timely manner. The Central Election Commission should consider conducting an independent audit of the equipment and software before election day.

Candidate Registration

17. Restrictions to the right to stand of those whose guilt in committing a crime has not been established by a final court decision should be lifted.
18. Considerations should be given to reviewing the threshold for voters' support to ensure the same conditions applicable to independent and party-nominated candidates.
19. To facilitate women's active participation in public and political life, including at mayoral elections, authorities at all levels should undertake comprehensive legal, institutional and educational efforts to overcome existing gender stereotypes. Political parties should identify and curb any possible gender-based barriers for women candidates, including by reviewing current intra-party practices that hinder more effective representation of women within party structures and as candidates.

Campaign Finance

20. Decisions on the allocation and transfer of public funds to eligible political parties should be taken in a timely manner to ensure effective access to these funds for campaign purposes. Consideration could be given to extending public campaign funding to independent candidates.
21. To enhance transparency, there should be periodic public disclosure of financial contributions to a campaign and the expenditure before election day.

Media

22. State authorities should promote an independent and genuinely diverse media environment that is free from political and corporate influence. Parliament should amend the Law on Audiovisual Media to limit the concentration of media ownership in the broadcasting sector and introduce measures to prevent undue influence of media owners over editorial policies.
23. The Electoral Code rules for the allocation of airtime to election contestants should be amended to reduce the advantage to the main parliamentary parties in editorial programming and to ensure a more equitable allocation of time for all contesting parties.

24. Audiovisual Media Authority should be provided with sufficient material and technical resources to enhance its media monitoring and reporting capacity.

Election Dispute Resolution

25. To ensure legal certainty and an effective legal remedy, the Complaints and Sanctions Commission should ensure uniform decision-making, avoiding inconsistent legal reasoning.
26. The Central Election Commission should consider all complaints and appeals in a timely manner and be properly prepared and resourced to do so. To ensure transparency all decisions on election disputes should be published promptly and accessible to all.

Election Observation

27. To enhance the transparency of the electoral process and contribute to public trust, all observers should be entitled to copies of the voting results protocols.

ANNEXE I: ELECTION RESULTS¹³⁰

Results of Mayoral Elections

Number of registered voters	3,650,658	%
Number of voters who voted	1,395,627	38.23
Number of valid votes for mayoral elections	1,352,330	
Number of invalid votes for mayoral elections	43,148	3.09
Number of valid votes for council elections	1,344,468	
Number of invalid votes for council elections	50,613	3.63

Electoral Subject	Mayor posts
Socialist Party of Albania	52
Together We Win Coalition	7
Greek Ethnic Minority for the Future Party	1

Results of Municipal Council Elections

Electoral Subject	Votes obtained		Seats
	Number	Percentage	
Socialist Party of Albania	579,614	43.11	758
Together We Win coalition	247,880	18.44	292
Democratic Party	103,719	7.71	123
Social Democratic Party	86,281	6.42	116
Environmental Agrarian Party of Albania	44,047	3.28	52
Albanian Republican Party	32,070	2.39	34
Party for Justice, Integration and Unity	28,977	2.16	25
Legality Movement Party	23,683	1.76	21
Green Party	16,326	1.21	20
Progressive Alliance Party	22,906	1.70	19
Social Democracy Party	21,798	1.62	18
National Arbno Alliance	11,680	0.87	18
New Democratic Spirit	18,458	1.37	17
Coalition "Right Liberal Alliance"	16,858	1.25	13
Democratic Alliance of Albania	6,129	0.46	10
Albanian Future	6,963	0.52	8
Christian Democratic Party	6,211	0.46	8
Greek Ethnic Minority for the Future Party	2,275	0.17	8
Independent candidates	7,165	0.53	7
Hashtag Initiative	10,804	0.80	5

¹³⁰ Source: [CEC results webpage](#). The mayoral election results in Rrogozhinë were annulled.

Electoral Subject	Votes obtained		Seats
	Number	Percentage	
National Front Party	7,611	0.57	5
Demo-Christian Alliance of Albania	6,373	0.47	5
Alliance for Democracy and Solidarity	4,647	0.35	5
National Unity Party	5,592	0.42	4
Democratic Conviction	4,226	0.31	4
National Conservative Party of Albania	1,881	0.14	4
Macedonian Alliance for European Integration	439	0.03	3
Party of Albanian Democratic Reforms	1,383	0.1	2
Albanian Labour Movement	546	0.04	2
Joint Movement	7,539	0.56	1
Conservative Party	2,767	0.21	1
Alliance for European Equality and Justice	1,125	0.08	1
New Movement	966	0.07	1
Communist Party of Albania	914	0.07	1
Party for the Protection of Emigrants' Rights	886	0.07	1
Left Front	270	0.02	1

ANNEXE II: LIST OF OBSERVERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

ODIHR EOM Core Team

Ambassador Audrey Glover	Head of Mission	United Kingdom
Armen Mazmanyan		Armenia
Davor Čorluka		Bosnia and Herzegovina
Desislava Hristova		Bulgaria
Stefan Krause		Germany
Giovanna Maiola		Italy
Jurga Lukšaitė		Lithuania
Rokas Stabingis		Lithuania
Roman Railean		Moldova
Slaviša Kotlaja		Montenegro
Tomasz Jańczy		Poland
Ružica Jovanović		Serbia
Saša Pokrajac		Serbia
Ivan Godársky		Slovakia
Anders Eriksson		Sweden
Kyle Bowers		United States of America

ODIHR EOM Long-term Observers

Adnan Habul		Bosnia and Herzegovina
Michael Walker		Canada
Pavlina Öhman		Czech Republic
Valdemar Uruba		Czech Republic
Niels Boel		Denmark
Sampsa Lauerma		Finland
Marion Jouannet		France
Christel Thibault		France
David Buerstedde		Germany
Claudia Schäfer		Germany
Eleni Ioannou		Greece
Nicholas Yiannias		Greece
Bernard Daly		Ireland
Lucrezia Aresi		Italy
Filippo Ristoldo		Italy
Tove Gravdal		Norway
Ana Mihajlović		Serbia
Nina Genneby		Sweden
Lars Tollemark		Sweden
Barbara Egger Maldonado		Switzerland
Martin Minder		Switzerland
David Ballard		United States of America
Raleigh Quesenberry		United States of America
Elia Varela-Serra		United States of America

ODIHR EOM Short-term Observers

Gertrude Brindlmayer		Austria
Anja Fiedler		Austria
Hermann Hagspiel		Austria
Bernhard Zimburg		Austria
Anela Cavdar		Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mubera Vulović		Bosnia and Herzegovina
Maria Ghazzaoui		Canada

Claude Larocque	Canada
David Milne	Canada
Meghan Riley	Canada
Martha Sellu	Canada
Pavel Hanosek	Czech Republic
Ondrej Picka	Czech Republic
Petra Schmiedova	Czech Republic
Kirsten Andersen	Denmark
Dorte Broen	Denmark
Ib Kok Hansen	Denmark
Mette Grumløse Hjelmsø	Denmark
Jorgen Hoxer	Denmark
Erik Nielsen	Denmark
Karen Skipper	Denmark
Bjarno Soerensen	Denmark
Sofia Svensson	Denmark
Nele Hollo	Estonia
Jari Huuhtanen	Finland
Eva Kajan	Finland
Mikko Niiles	Finland
Noora Simola	Finland
Charlotte Barthelot de Bellefonds	France
Alexandre Benz	France
Nadia Jurzac	France
Arthur Langlois	France
Pascale Le Hel	France
Alexiei Ozeretzkovsky	France
Jasmine Salhab	France
Marion Van der Pyl Lenne	France
Anja Bronny	Germany
Birgit Daiber	Germany
Tina Debenham	Germany
Isabella Gabriel	Germany
Luiz Garcia Pereira Ramalho	Germany
Dorothee Georg	Germany
Harald Happel	Germany
Jochen Hayungs	Germany
Martin Herrmann	Germany
Henning Horstmeyer	Germany
Christiane Jaenicke	Germany
Helmut Klawonn	Germany
Timo Knaebe	Germany
Martin Kobler	Germany
Peter Kohlmeier	Germany
Brigitte Krech	Germany
Stefan Lesjak	Germany
Edeltraud Lier	Germany
Alexander Loch	Germany
Elena Lopez Werner	Germany
Martin Nölle	Germany
Brigitte Schmid	Germany
Tillmann Schneider	Germany
Ulrich Seel	Germany
Heidrun Smers	Germany
Barbara Staib	Germany

Anca Stan	Germany
Arnim Stauth	Germany
Evelyn Stöckle	Germany
Barbara Wägerle	Germany
Janette Colgan	Ireland
Michael Gannon	Ireland
Fidelma Healy Eames	Ireland
Rossana Mamberto	Italy
Paolo Pagotto	Italy
Gilberto Pelosi	Italy
Rossella Pizzera	Italy
Daniele Sferra	Italy
Monica Simeone	Italy
Sirbu Rodica	Moldova
Miloš Nikolić	Montenegro
Nazim Rechi	North Macedonia
Inger Bakken	Norway
Alida Boye	Norway
Bjørn Heger	Norway
Rolf Ranheim	Norway
Sven Gunnar Simonsen	Norway
Joana Pereira	Portugal
Emanuela Darie	Romania
Alice Minculescu	Romania
Catalina Niculae	Romania
Stefan Rantzos	Romania
Aleksandra Radosavljević	Serbia
Sergio Barrera	Spain
Esther Beceiro Garcia	Spain
Javier Martin Cantera	Spain
Maria Romero Pardo	Spain
Linda Cederblad	Sweden
Mats Ekholm	Sweden
Carl Johan Ekstedt	Sweden
Stig Lennart Glans	Sweden
Åke Lennart Haggren	Sweden
Anna Birgitta Jacobson	Sweden
Inger Elisabeth Johansson	Sweden
Dalia Lahdo	Sweden
Stina Elisabet Larserud	Sweden
Sara Lindblom	Sweden
Andre Nilen	Sweden
Håkan Per-Olov Nyman	Sweden
Helena Olsson	Sweden
Maja Trille Permerup	Sweden
Lisa Kristina Petri	Sweden
Jan Roland Pettersson	Sweden
Inga Kerstin Sundberg	Sweden
Bo Pontus Tallberg	Sweden
Fairlie Chappuis Jensen	Switzerland
Diana Ferrari	Switzerland
Michelle Gysin	Switzerland
Magali Mores	Switzerland
Valerie Nadrai	Switzerland
Hans-Peter Portmann	Switzerland

Gianluca Rigolio	Switzerland
Nadia Simoes	Switzerland
Lena Studer	Switzerland
Lee Bauer	United States of America
Kelly Beadle	United States of America
Daniel Brezina	United States of America
Carolyn Brommer	United States of America
Jennifer Butz	United States of America
Gina Chirillo	United States of America
Tracey Cobb	United States of America
Aiesha Eleusizov	United States of America
Jeffrey Erlich	United States of America
Naida Filipovic	United States of America
Robert Frost	United States of America
Doris Garcia-Smith	United States of America
Rebecca Graham	United States of America
Robert Hampshire	United States of America
Barron Helgoe	United States of America
Robert Irish	United States of America
Junie Joseph	United States of America
Emily Koo	United States of America
Micah Lebson	United States of America
Eric Manton	United States of America
Alexander Mayer	United States of America
William McGregor	United States of America
Auset Mitchell	United States of America
Brooke Nagle	United States of America
Danny Navarro	United States of America
Steven Nothern	United States of America
Urania Petit	United States of America
Constance Phlipot	United States of America
Mitchell Polman	United States of America
Sarah Prunier-Duparge	United States of America
Karen Reinhardt	United States of America
Kevin Rejent	United States of America
Emily Rome	United States of America
Thomas Rome	United States of America
Michael Sawyer	United States of America
Melody Shekari	United States of America
Laura Sherman	United States of America
Steven Smith	United States of America
Marilyn Stempler	United States of America
Logan Trombley	United States of America
Rene Valdiosera	United States of America
Cara Vetsch	United States of America
Annisa Wanat	United States of America
Henry Wathen	United States of America
Susanna Zaraysky	United States of America

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Stewart Dickson	Head of Delegation	United Kingdom
Jana Fischerova		Czech Republic
Kirsten Andersen		Denmark
Ott Kasuri		Estonia
Tanja Joona		Finland

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Markku Suski	Finland
Xavier Cadoret	France
Mathilde Girardi	France
Svitlana Pereverten	France
Martine Roudolff	France
Sevdia Ugrekheldidze	Georgia
Konstantinos Koukas	Greece
James Moloney	Ireland
Belinda Gottardi	Italy
Alexander Boomgaars	Netherlands
Joao Manuel Esteves	Portugal
Matija Kovac	Serbia
Ana Gonzalez Rodriguez	Spain
Kristoffer Tamsons	Sweden
Marie Thomet	Switzerland

European Parliament

Sven Simon	Head of Delegation	Germany
Blagoy Klimov	MEP	Bulgaria
Anna Ksiazczakova	MEP	Czech Republic
Patricia Chagnon	MEP	France
Lars Patrick Berg	MEP	Germany
Tobias Teuscher	MEP	Germany
Nikos Papandreou	MEP	Greece
Raffaele Luise	MEP	Italy
Francesco Miatto	MEP	Italy
Wojciech Sperzynski	MEP	Poland

ABOUT ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 150 staff.

ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

ODIHR also assists participating States in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights and fundamental freedoms** consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas, including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked people, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance and non-discrimination**, ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website (www.osce.org/odihr).