

2005 Parliamentary Elections in Albania

INTRODUCTION

On the 3rd of July the Albanian people cast their ballots to elect a new parliament. One-hundred representatives were elected uninominal in 100 zonal elections regions and another 40 on a national list based on the proportional system.

European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO) observed the Albanian parliamentary elections with 60 short term observers, representing 10 countries and 12 organizations. The observers were deployed throughout Albania and monitored the electoral process in 400 voting centers and 30 counting centers. The observers' task was to closely monitor all the stages of the electoral process – from the opening through the closing of the polling station and during the entire counting process - and to report their findings. ENEMO was invited to observe these elections by the National Democratic Institute, as part of the USAID-funded Democracy and Governance in Albania program.

ENEMO is a network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), committed to the principles of non-partisanship, which has organized large-scale election observations in its respective countries for a number of years. These nonpartisan domestic groups specialize in election monitoring in the OSCE region of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union countries. Collectively, ENEMO organizations have observed in a total of more than 110 national elections and have trained more than 100,000 election monitors. In addition, observers from the monitoring NGOs have been involved in more than 40 international election monitoring missions.

This report reflects the total election process after the voting and counting processes were finished. Due to the incumbent duties of our observers, the report focuses mainly on the election and counting days.

ASSESSMENT OF ELECTIONS

The 2005 Albanian Parliamentary Elections were conducted in a fair manner, almost complying with some of the international standards of democratic elections. Nonetheless, there were reported a series of irregularities and flaws that might cast doubt over the electoral process. Voters' lists, cases of violence and intimidation, and problems with the management of the voting and counting procedures are issues that have to be improved before the next elections.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

ENEMO acknowledges the efforts made by state institutions to ensure a correct electoral process. ENEMO would like to emphasize the beneficial cooperation it had with the Central Election Commission (CEC). As concerns the ENEMO mission, it can be assessed that the CEC complied with all the standards of transparency required by a fair electoral process.

The education of the Vote Counting Center (VCC) members was ranked by ENEMO observers from poor to fair. There were several examples where the VCC performance was problematic in general: officials did not know how to fill in the protocols and procedures had to be repeated while others tried to manage working only after finding information in different manuals.

The education of Zonal Election Commission (ZEC) and counting team members varied - from very good in urban areas to fair or poor in rural areas. The late training of the counting teams and the duration of the counting with no provision for breaks negatively affected many centers and left an increased possibility of error. Multiple cases of the commissioners leaving their stations and duties in the last stage of counting were observed.

Although in most cases observers were allowed to monitor all phases of the voting and counting processes, there were some cases when observers were hindered in their monitoring. Consequently, ENEMO stresses the need for complete transparency in the voting and counting processes.

ELECTION DAY

ENEMO observers were deployed throughout Albania and monitored the opening, voting and closing processes in 400 voting centers. In most of the cases Election Day activities developed in a fair manner. ENEMO observers' assessments were positive regarding the level of understanding of voting procedures by the voters. However, a series of irregularities were reported; they are described below:

Voting Centers not opening on time

The following voting centers were not opened on time: 3004 (ZEC 66, Fier); 4590 (ZEC 98, Himara); 3904 (ZEC 75 Pogradec); 4394 (ZEC 91 Tepelena), 4439 (ZEC 94, Vlora), especially due to poor organization. In ZEC 26 all voting centers were opened more than 90 minutes late.

Violations of voting procedures

ENEMO observers reported several shortcomings in the voting process such as: the misuse of UV lamps (VC 900, 901, ZEC 16, Fushe; VC 3014, ZEC 69, Fier; VC 1296 ZEC 24, Tirana; VC 2169, ZEC 48, Kavaje; VC 3088, ZEC 69, Fier; VC 3484, 3487, ZEC 77, Ura-Vajgurore; VC 1305, ZEC 24, Tirana) and invisible ink (VC 4490, ZEC 95, Vlore; VC 4685 ZEC 100, Saranda; VC 30, ZEC 1, Koplik), improper identification of the voters' ID (VC 218, ZEC 6, Skoder), crowded voting centers (VC 1981, ZEC 40, Tirana; VC 4173, ZEC 89, Permeto; VC 328, ZEC 7, Skoder), problems in voters' lists (VC 1927, ZEC 32, Tirana; VC 2818, ZEC 62, Lushnje), campaigning (VC 4585, ZEC 98, Saranda; VC 2419, ZEC 52, Labinot-Fushe; VC 3065, ZEC 69, Fier; VC 4173, ZEC 89, Permet), group voting (VC 77, ZEC 2, Postribe), unauthorized persons in the precinct of the VC 83, ZEC 2, Postribe. In VC 928, ZEC 18, Burrel, ENEMO observers reported damages of the booths.

Violations of closing procedure

In VC 3662, ZEC 80, Korca and in VC 4667, ZEC 99, Saranda members of the VCCs did not count the ballots at the opening, consequently they had problems in filling out the protocols.

VC 1268, ZEC 23, Kruje was not closed on time. At 10 pm on Election Day, more than 100 people were still waiting to vote. The VCC could not handle the situation and they called the police.

Unauthorized persons were reported in the precinct of the VC 911, ZEC 16, Marmuras during the closing process.

Limits of the observers' rights

In VC 1981, ZEC 40, Tirana and VC 1136, ZEC 21, Peshkopi members of the commission hindered the activity of the observers by refusing to provide information about the voting process.

ENEMO observers were prevented from entering voting center 1744, ZEC 40, Tirana, without a grounded explanation by the members of the voting commissions. The next ENEMO team that came was allowed to enter the VC.

ENEMO observers, other observers and the media were prevented from monitoring the process of receiving the ballot boxes in ZEC 30, Durres, with no legal grounds.

Violence and intimidation

ENEMO observers reported a fight in the surroundings of the VC 3581, ZEC 79, Polican.

Insufficient number of commission members present

Cases of late arrivals of the members of Voting Centers were reported in: VC 1925, ZEC 32, Tirana; VC 3904, ZEC 75, Pogradec.

According to ENEMO observers multiple cases of family voting took place in rural areas around the country. Observers reported multiple cases of voting with improper documents, problems in voters' lists and cases of crowded VCs. The education of the VCC members was ranked by ENEMO observers from poor to fair.

THE COUNTING PROCESS

Counting centers generally conducted counting in order and according to the official procedure. However, in zones 1 and 99, counting teams rushed through the counting procedure without regard for transparency, and in zone 18 teams conducted counting in a contested way due to frequent arguments between counting team members. An insufficient number of commission members were present in zones 33 and 1.

ENEMO observers reported the presence of unauthorized people in the counting area in zones 1 and 66, and disorder in the counting center in zone 40. Observers had problems entering the counting centers in zones 40 and 30; in zone 1 they could not properly monitor the counting process.

CONCLUSION

These elections are an important step forward to meeting the standards of democratic elections that are implemented according to international democratic standards.

Consequently, in order to improve voters' rights, the process of updating of voters' lists should begin at once. The election period should be shortened and counting should take place in voting centers, which will bring more efficiency and transparency to the process. A campaign for civic education regarding family voting could improve the overall implementation of the election process.