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SILBA PRELIMINARY REPORT

ALBANIA

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 25 JUNE 2017

On 25 June 2017, Silba - Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy (Silba) carried out a short-term Election Observation Mission (EOM) in 5 electoral districts in the municipality of Tirana to observe the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Albania.

Silba sent a delegation of 30 short-term observers (STOs) assisted by local interpreters to observe the elections. All STOs were officially accredited by the Albanian Central Election Committee (CEC) and through their observations adhered to the electoral code of Albania as well as the international standards for elections observations.

Silba deployed its STOs four days prior to election day and met with relevant institutions, international organisations and national NGOs in order to gain knowledge about the political and economical situation in Albania. The STOs received sufficient observation training through a OSCE/ODIHR e-learning course prior to the EOM, as well as a seminar on observing and communication of the 1) opening procedures, 2) general procedures and 3) closing procedures at the voting centers.

1) OPENING OF VOTING CENTERS

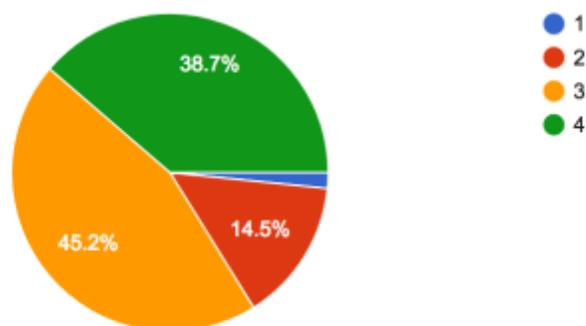
As stated in the Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, the opening of the voting centers was set to open at 7:00 AM. In Tirana, our STOs experienced that several centers opened too late, and one opened too early. The opening of one center was 35 minutes late due to missing party delegates, whereas voting already begun before 7:00 AM at another center. It remains unclear how long the voting process had been open at this particular center. Besides these irregularities, all other observed voting centers followed the established procedures. This includes an acceptable standard regarding voting booths, ballot papers, voters lists, knowledge of protocols among officials and ballot box seals.

In three cases, observers were not allowed to enter the voting center before it opened and could thus not observe the opening procedure.

2) GENERAL FINDINGS

Overall rating (1 very bad - 4 very good):

124 responses



Silba's observers evaluated the general proceedings positively with 38,7% of the observed voting centers evaluated as "very good", while 45,2% of the voting centers were evaluated as "good". Silba's observers were generally well received by the voting center officials (PSOs) and had access to the necessary information as well as adequate views of the activities in the centers. Out of 126 voting centers, only one center was found to be in an overall "very bad"

standard, while the standard was found to be “bad” in 18 cases. Some observers reported that particular PSOs and party representatives at some voting centers behaved significantly different as a result of the presence of observers. As confirmed by our interpreters, PSOs and party representatives in some instances continuously referred to the presence of our observers, and adjusted their behaviour accordingly.

Silba did not find evidence of systematic voter inducing and or intimidation taking place in or in the vicinity of the voting centers observed. However, Silba’s STOs found several minor violations, which may have made it possible for more serious irregularities. In some cases, inappropriate activities by either unauthorized persons or official party representatives led to unrest or to interference in the procedures followed. In one instance, our observers noticed aggressive behaviour by the voting center officials towards voters from the Roma minority, which in one of such cases led to the police being contacted by the PSO’s. Furthermore, our observers noted that in 42 out of 126 voting centers observed, the accessibility of the voting centers was inadequate and that there appeared to be no coherent policy for assisting disabled voters.

The largest concern regarding the voting procedure remains the behaviour of party representatives and the presence and behaviour of unauthorized persons in and near the polling stations. Silba’s observers noted that PSOs would systematically and in a deliberate manner inform the party representatives know of a specific number attached to the voter’s ID. This could potentially lead to patronage and social control, since party representatives, as election day proceeded, seemed aware of identities of voters that had not yet shown up. When asked about this procedure, one party representative said he circled the numbers in order to check whether the voters "were voting for the party". One voter was observed to claim feeling pressured to vote after receiving phone calls from a political party.

3) CLOSING PROCEDURE

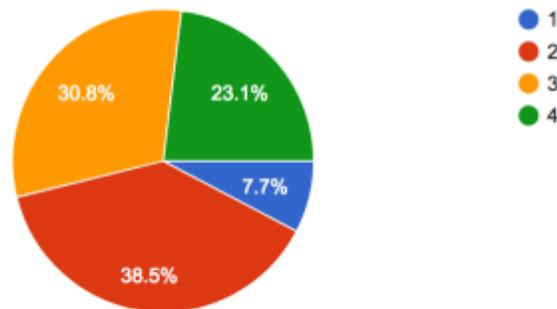
The CEC decided to postpone the closure of the voting centers by one hour (from 7:00PM to 8:00PM) on election day at 06:45PM, which resulted in unrest at several centers. Some

voting centers closed later, while others did not. Our observers noted that the overall communication regarding this decision was rather unclear and the closing procedure as well as the counting proved chaotic. One Silba observation team reported that the PSOs did not possess the necessary training in order to close the voting center appropriately and conclusively were assisted by a PSO from another center.

Several STO teams were asked to leave during the closing procedure or were not allowed to enter the counting center in their electoral district. The observation teams, that observed the counting process described it as chaotic and difficult to assess due to the crowdedness of the centers and obscurity of the procedures followed. Overall, the closing and counting procedure was described “bad” or “very bad” by 46, 2% of the STOs and as “good” of “very good” by 53, 9% of Silba’s observation teams. It should be noted, however, that due to the late start of the counting, the available data on the closing procedures is smaller than for the two sections above.

Overall rating (1 very bad - 4 very good):

13 responses



4)

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

In general, the opening and voting procedures during the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Albania on 25 June appear to have been organised in a good manner and in accordance to international standards. The opening procedures and general voting

procedures were described to be “good” by most of our observers, despite some minor irregularities. The key concerns remains the presence of party observers and the lack of transparency in their activities inside and outside of the voting center. The decision of the CEC to postpone the closing by one hour created unrest at the end of the day and affected the closing procedures. In addition, the closing procedures and counting process was perceived as rather chaotic in general.