Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16201
19 June 2025

Observation of the parliamentary elections in Albania (11 May 2025)

Election observation report
Rapporteur: Mr Simone BILLI, Italy, European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates

1. Introduction

1. On 27 January 2025, the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly decided to observe the parliamentary elections in Albania scheduled on 11 May 2025 (subject to receiving an invitation) and to set up an ad hoc committee composed of 20 members (SOC: 6; EPP/CD: 6; ECPA: 4; ALDE: 3; UEL: 1), as well as the two co-rapporteurs of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), and to conduct a pre-electoral mission. On 5 February 2025, the Speaker of the Parliament of Albania invited the Assembly to observe the parliamentary elections in the country. On 31 January 2025, the Bureau appointed me chairperson of the ad hoc committee. The composition of the ad hoc committee (hereafter the "PACE delegation") is provided in Appendix 1.

2. Albania is under the post-monitoring procedure of the Assembly and has therefore committed to inviting the Assembly to observe elections. The PACE delegation notes that Albania has signed and ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and its Additional Protocol (ETS No. 9), which enshrine fundamental principles crucial for a functioning democracy, including the right to free elections (Article 3 of the Additional Protocol), freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and the prohibition of discrimination (Articles 10, 11 and 14 of the Convention).

3. In accordance with the co-operation agreement signed on 4 October 2004 between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), a representative of the Venice Commission provided legal support to the PACE delegation.

4. A two-day pre-electoral mission took place on 3-4 April 2025 in Tirana to assess the electoral campaign and the broader political environment. The programme of the mission is outlined in Appendix 2, and its pre-electoral statement is provided in Appendix 3.

5. For the observation of the parliamentary elections on 11 May 2025, the PACE delegation worked from 9 to 12 May as part of an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), together with delegations from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE-PA), the European Parliament (EP) as well as the electoral observation mission of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). The programme of the meetings held during this period is detailed in Appendix 4.

6. The PACE delegation thanks the Albanian authorities for their invitation and assistance, as well as all interlocutors and international partners for their co-operation. The delegation also extends its appreciation to the Council of Europe Office in Tirana for its support in facilitating the smooth organisation of the pre-electoral mission meetings.

7. The IEOM issued a joint press release (see Appendix 5) and a "Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions",[1] which provide detailed information. These documents were presented at a joint press conference in Tirana on 12 May 2025.

2. Context and recent developments

8. Parliamentary elections were held on 11 May in a highly polarised political environment. European Union (EU) accession featured prominently in political discourse, with the ruling Socialist Party (SP) campaigning for membership by 2030 and highlighting negotiation milestones. However, the opposition parties criticised the SP for using EU integration rhetoric to distract from domestic issues such as living standards, corruption and democratic backsliding.

9. The first-ever implementation of out-of-country voting in these elections was widely regarded as a significant achievement.

10. The political landscape is dominated by the SP, led by Prime Minister Edi Rama, and the main opposition Democratic Party (DP), led by Sali Berisha. The SP has won three consecutive parliamentary elections since 2013, further consolidating its power in the 2023 local elections. Internal conflicts within the DP have led to the formation of splinter parties (and three DP factions in parliament) following a profound leadership crisis that, until recently, prevented DP from properly functioning as an opposition party and impacted its campaign.

11. In October 2024, former Albanian President Ilir Meta, leader of the Freedom Party (FP), was arrested on corruption charges. In November, the house arrest measures imposed on Sali Berisha in December 2023 were lifted pending trial on corruption charges. Several DP-led protests took place in late 2024 and early 2025, driven by concerns over the perceived erosion of democratic institutions and allegations of government corruption and misuse of State resources. The protests also responded to high-profile arrests which some opposition groups saw as politically motivated. In February 2025, Erion Veliaj, the mayor of Tirana and a prominent SP member, was arrested on corruption charges.

12. Although women have become more politically engaged in recent years, they continue to face long-standing systemic obstacles to advancement, including weak internal party democracy and limited access to financing. While women hold half of the ministerial posts, they are less represented in parliament, occupying 50 out of 140 seats (36%).

3. Legal electoral framework and recent amendments

3.1. Legal framework

13. The legal electoral framework primarily consists of the 1998 Constitution, which was last amended in 2020, and the 2008 Electoral Code, which was last amended in 2025. Other legislation and regulations complement these core provisions with specific rules (e.g. on disqualification).

14. A major revision of the Electoral Code was adopted in 2020, with subsequent amendments being adopted in July and October of that year. The first set of amendments was adopted based on a consensus between all political parties, following lengthy negotiations in the Political Council (an informal, ad hoc, cross-party working group aimed at building consensus, particularly during electoral or constitutional reforms), which was urged by the international community. When the necessary constitutional amendments were discussed, the DP's parliamentary faction introduced the proposal of open lists, which had not been part of the Council's agreement. The SP supported this, contrary to the non-parliamentary wing of the DP and the LSI (Socialist Movement for Integration), who feared it would weaken their control over the lists. President Ilir Meta sent the second set of amendments to the Venice Commission. Consequently, the Venice Commission and the ODIHR examined the latter amendments, but the 2020 major reform of the Electoral Code was not reviewed.

15. Some of the recommendations set out in the 2020 Opinion[2] were adopted, including the abolition of the right of political party leaders to stand in multiple constituencies. However, others were not, including the reduction of the minimum number of candidates required on a list, the introduction of provisions to ensure equal rights for all parties within a coalition to appeal actions and decisions of the coalition, and the right of individual candidates to submit complaints and appeals regarding the allocation of seats within a list.

16. Since then, the Electoral Code has been amended three times (in 2021, 2024 and 2025). The 2024 and 2025 amendments implemented and further specified provisions on postal voting for Albanian citizens living abroad, enabling voters abroad to participate in national elections for the first time. These amendments were

1. Albania, Parliamentary Elections, 11 May 2025: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions | OSCE.
2. Venice Commission and ODIHR, CDL-AD(2020)036, Joint Opinion on the amendments to the Constitution of 30 July 2020 and to the Electoral Code of 5 October 2020.

adopted at the last minute, despite the Constitutional Court's decision – back in December 2022 – that the Albanian Parliament had violated the Constitution by preventing Albanians living abroad from voting in the 2021 parliamentary elections. This option is made available to all eligible voters and is administered by the Central Election Commission (CEC). While the diaspora vote represents an important step forward in Albania's electoral process, international experience shows that implementing this voting channel is not easy. In this regard, both the CEC and political representatives expressed concerns before the elections about the limited timeframe for mailing and receiving ballots from abroad. According to some sources, there were concerns that "postal services would require more than 40 days to deliver ballots to voters and return them to the CEC for counting. Since ballot printing would occur only 20 days before election day, this delay posed a risk of excluding diaspora votes from the final tally".

17. The amendments also remove the requirement for independent candidates to obtain at least 1% of the valid votes nationwide in order to be included in the allocation of mandates. This strengthens the effective participation of citizens who are not aligned to a party in the electoral process. The national electoral threshold for political parties and coalitions remains unchanged.

18. Regarding the allocation of mandates, an important change from 2024 onwards is that political parties and coalitions must present both a closed multi-name list of candidates in a fixed order and an open multi-name list subject to preference voting. The closed list takes precedence over the open list in the allocation of mandates.

19. While the Albanian legal framework and international election observation reports consistently refer to these systems as "preferential vote" or "preferential voting", the system in question is not strictly preferential. For this reason, the term "preference" is used here instead.

20. By requiring two different sets of candidate lists, the amendments significantly reduce voters' role in electing candidates from party/coalition lists. The amendment faced significant criticism from several minor parties who took the mixed candidate list system to the Constitutional Court, claiming that the addition of closed lists was designed to favour large parties by increasing their control over candidate selection.

21. Following the amendment in 2024, which eliminated an exception for leaders of parties in the Electoral Code, the candidates registered on a fixed-order list in one electoral district cannot be registered in another one or appear on a list subject to preference voting.

22. Some of the amendments follow up on prior recommendations, while other recommendations remain unimplemented, particularly those relating to a more balanced composition of lower-level election commissions and the suffrage rights of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities.

3.2. Electoral system

23. According to Article 64 of the Constitution, the 140-member Parliament is elected for a four-year term using a regional d'Hondt proportional system. Candidates are elected from 12 multi-seat electoral districts (zones) that correspond to the administrative regions. In 2024, the CEC reallocated the number of seats for each district, ranging from 3 in Kukës to 37 in Tirana, which gained an additional seat.

24. The threshold to obtain a seat is 1% nationwide, except for independent candidates.

25. As indicated above, parties/coalitions must submit two lists for each electoral district. The number of candidates on the closed (fixed-order multi-name) list must match one third of the seats allocated to the electoral district (this number may be rounded up or down), while the number of candidates on the open multi-name list, which is subject to preference voting, must match the number of available seats in each electoral district. To improve gender balance in parliament, the Electoral Code requires that one out of every three candidates nominated on the closed list and one out of three candidates elected from the open list must be from the gender that is less represented in parliament.

26. Voters may express a preference for either a fixed-order multi-name list or a candidate from a multi-name list subject to preference voting.

27. When allocating seats to candidates, the Electoral Code stipulates that candidates from the closed list take precedence over those from the open list, in order of position on the list. Candidates from the preference voting list may only be elected once all the available candidates from the closed list have been exhausted. Candidates on the preference voting list are reordered based on the number of preference votes received by each candidate, taking into account the gender-balanced representation rule (at least the third seat must be

assigned to the gender that is less represented). According to Article 4 of the Electoral Code, the gender quota for the under-represented gender is set at a minimum of 30% of the Parliament of Albania's composition.

3.3. Election administration

28. The election administration is composed of the Central Election Commission, 92 Commissions of Electoral Administration Zones (CEAZs), and some 5 200 voting centre commissions. Counting is performed by counting teams in 92 ballot counting centres (BCCs), one for each electoral administration zone.

29. The structure and composition of the CEC did not change in the last electoral cycle and consists of three sub-structures. Firstly, there is the State Election Commissioner, who exercises executive powers, steers the administration and represents the CEC in relations with third parties, as well as the State Election Deputy commissioner who is tasked with supervising voter identification technology, as well as the recruitment and training of election officials. Secondly, there is the Regulatory Commission, which is responsible for adopting normative sub-legal acts as prescribed by the Electoral Code. Thirdly, there is the Complaints and Sanctions Commission, which examines complaints against the decisions of the Commissioner and the CEAZs. It also decides on the invalidity of votes and election results and imposes sanctions for violations of the Electoral Code upon the Commissioner's request. All CEC members are elected by parliament for different lengths of time to ensure turnover while retaining institutional memory.

30. The remaining levels of election administration comprise delegates appointed by political parties in proportion to their parliamentary representation. The politicisation of the lower levels of election administration is a key concern, given the possibility that members may be removed by the political parties that appointed them, even shortly before elections. This has been found to cause several issues in the conduct of democratic elections, including cascading delays in appointing polling station commissioners and counting teams, which leaves little time for training and preparation. Another problem is the frequent, last-minute and discretionary dismissal of appointees by political parties. Overall, these delays and dismissals undermine professionalism on election day, challenge dispute resolution process deadlines and jeopardise trust in the electoral process. Observers have identified negative consequences such as polling station staff not showing up at opening time and/or lacking adequate knowledge, group and family voting, abuse of assisted voting, poor polling station layout, and presence of unauthorised people. The under-representation of women in election administration is another shortcoming resulting from the current framework.

31. In 2024, amendments to the Electoral Code entrusted the CEC with registering and organising voting for citizens residing outside Albania, including votes counting. However, political parties remain reluctant to entrust the CEC with managing election operations, and a later legislative revision entrusted counting procedures to multi-party commissions.

3.4. Right to vote

32. The right to vote is granted to Albanian citizens who are 18 years of age or older. This right is suspended for citizens who are serving a prison sentence for committing specific crimes. Citizens whose legal incapacity is declared by a court decision cannot vote, at odds with international obligations prohibiting discrimination based on disability. The voter registration system is passive; however, voters residing abroad must actively register no later than 60 days before election day. Additionally, voters aged over 100 are automatically removed from the electoral register. Some 3.6 million voters were registered for these elections, including those residing abroad.

33. Biometric voter identification was used for the second time in parliamentary elections. Accordingly, on election day, all voters had their fingerprints scanned and stored electronically prior to being handed a ballot. The collected data is then checked for potential cases of multiple voting. Stakeholders have confirmed the general credibility of the voter identification system.

34. Any eligible voter can stand in the elections, except those serving a prison sentence, those with a prior conviction for specific crimes, and certain categories of officials whose activities are incompatible with the right to stand.

3.5. Registration of candidates

35. Candidate lists can be submitted by political parties and party coalitions. Independent candidates can stand for election by being nominated by groups of voters. In line with the 2024 amendments to the Electoral Code, political parties/coalitions must submit two candidate lists (see above, paragraphs 18 and 25). Candidates submitted on a fixed-order list in one electoral district cannot be registered in another district or appear on a list subject to preference voting.

36. Failure to submit a sufficient number of candidates in any given district may lead to denial in registration.

37. In 2025, amendments were made to the Electoral Code, enacted less than a year before election day and after the President had called for parliamentary elections. These amendments reduced the time limits for registering political parties, electoral coalitions and independent candidates with electoral authorities (Articles 64, 65 and 69 of the Electoral Code), and for making corrections to documentation that has been submitted (Article 73 of the Electoral Code).

38. Due to the new requirement to submit two different lists, changes have been made to the layout of the ballot, particularly in Tirana district, where the ballot paper did not include the names of candidates on the closed list. This may cause issues regarding voters' knowledge of the candidates they are voting for.

3.6. Election campaign and financing

39. The regulated election campaign began on 12 April 2025 and ended 24 hours before election day. There are no sanctions for early campaigning. Civil servants are prohibited from engaging in political activities during official working hours, and public institutions are barred from conducting election-related campaigns.

40. Public institutions, State agencies and enterprises must report to the CEC through a dedicated platform hosted on the CEC website on all activities involving citizens' and media's participation during the four months preceding election day. This information is available on the CEC website. The CEC has the power to declare an activity as potentially constituting a misuse of State resources and to block broadcast media or other campaign coverage events.

41. Election campaigns may be financed from public and private funds, including loans. Parliamentary parties receive an annual funding from the State budget. Additionally, all parties that received more than 1% of valid votes in the previous parliamentary elections are entitled to public funding for their campaigns. Independent candidates are not entitled to public funding. Donations from citizens and legal entities, including in-kind donations, are capped at 1 million Albanian leks (ALL) (approximately 10 150 EUR). Contributions above 50 000 ALL must be made via a designated bank account and disclosed.

42. A political party's campaign expenses may not exceed three times the highest amount received from public funds for campaigning, while an independent candidate's expenses may not exceed 50% of this amount. Each contestant must record the amount of donations received, as well as donor identification data, in a special register approved by the CEC. Contestants must submit reports on their campaign finances within 60 days of the election results being announced.

43. Following the announcement of the final election results, the CEC must appoint auditors to oversee each contestant's campaign funds. The CEC must publish the auditors' reports within 30 days of their submission. The CEC is authorised to verify the information in these reports and may impose sanctions on contestants for non-compliance with campaign finance rules. According to local stakeholders, campaign finance regulations could be improved further, particularly by introducing more effective and dissuasive sanctions and regulating third-party campaigning.

3.7. Complaints and appeals

44. Decisions of election administration bodies can only be challenged by parties and independent candidates standing for election before the CEC, while citizen observers can only challenge CEC and CEAZ decisions concerning their accreditation. Complaints against decisions made by the Commissioner and the CEAZs (including those relating to election results) are submitted to the Complaints and Sanctions Commission. Complaints and appeals against other CEC entities can be brought to the Electoral College of the Court of Appeals of Tirana, whose decisions are final.

45. The Electoral College is the highest authority on electoral disputes. It consists of eight judges from the first instance and appeal courts, who are appointed for a four-year term and selected by lot. All cases are considered during open hearings, with decisions published on the website of the Court of Appeals of Tirana.

3.8. Election day

46. There is a limited option to vote electronically in Tirana and Vorë, where electronic voting pilots are conducted with contingency measures in place in case of dysfunction of the e-voting system.

47. Once the voting centre commissions complete the closing procedures, the ballot boxes and the box containing the voting materials are sent to the 92 ballot counting centres, where counting takes place, carried out by dedicated teams, with one centre covering each electoral administration zone. Counting shall not to start until all boxes containing ballot papers and voting materials have been received from all voting centres under the jurisdiction of the respective counting team.

48. Counting should proceed without interruption until all ballot boxes have been processed. Once counting for one electoral administration zone is complete, the CEAZ must compile the aggregate table of election results and issue it no later than 22:00 on the day after election day. Copies of the aggregate table of results and the tables of results for each polling station are sent immediately to the CEC.

3.9. Out-of-country voting

49. Albanian citizens residing abroad who wished to vote in the parliamentary elections had to register individually on an out-of-country voters list managed by the CEC, which assigns voters to their last district of residency. This list is compiled anew for each election, starting 120 days before election day and closing 60 days prior. Registration requires the submission of documents proving residence abroad, and identity is verified through the National Civil Registry. A preliminary list is published 63 days before the election to allow for corrections, and the final list is confirmed 60 days prior to the election. Voters on this list are removed from the domestic voter register, and any disputes can be appealed to the Tirana First Instance Court. The process is governed by detailed rules and timelines issued by the CEC, with oversight from technical auditors and in co-ordination with the National Civil Registry.

50. Voting begins abroad when the CEC starts sending voting documents and instructions to registered voters, and ends when voting concludes in Albania. The CEC must prioritise selecting reputable international express mail providers using the fastest procedures permitted by public procurement rules. Voters abroad receive their ballot papers and other materials by post at their declared address; the ballot papers are almost identical to the domestic version. Voters must return their completed ballots to the CEC via the aforementioned international postal services. Only ballots received by the deadline, or clearly marked as having entered Albania by that time, are accepted.

51. Upon arrival at the CEC, the ballots are registered and sorted according to the electoral zone of the voter's last Albanian residence. Initially, the counting was entrusted to the CEC; however, following the 2025 amendments, postal ballots are now to be counted at a designated centre, and the process begins simultaneously with the in-country counting for the corresponding electoral zone. This process is overseen by a commission of four members, with two proposed by the largest parliamentary majority party and two by the largest opposition party. A legally qualified secretary is also selected through an open process. Additional commissions may be formed if the number of registered voters abroad exceeds 80 000.

52. Article 2 of the 2025 amendments modifies Article 25/1, which stipulates that the CEC will cover all mailing costs related to voting from abroad, including the return of completed ballots and the initial dispatch of electoral materials.

4. Key findings of the PACE pre-electoral mission

53. During our pre-electoral mission to Tirana on 3-4 April 2025, which aimed to assess the electoral campaign and the political climate ahead of the parliamentary elections, we met with a wide range of electoral stakeholders: the Speaker of Parliament, leaders and representatives of the main parliamentary groups and the main extra-parliamentary political parties, members of the Albanian delegation to the PACE, the Head and Deputy Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, the State Election Commissioner and members of the CEC, representatives of the diplomatic community, civil society and the media, representatives of the Audio-visual media Authority, the Media and Information Agency and the National Bureau of Investigation Special Structure for Combating Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK).

54. We identified several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure democratic processes and fair and competitive elections.

55. While acknowledging the importance of fighting corruption, we emphasised the need to avoid the perception of favouring one political party over another, as this could undermine public confidence in the fight against corruption and in the electoral process itself.

56. We were informed of the deep-rooted “winner-takes-all” culture of political competition in Albania, where the objective is not to encourage future collaboration, but rather to minimise the influence of opponents, resulting in limited opportunities for constructive dialogue.

57. We noted that Albania will be using out-of-country voting for the first time. While this is a positive step towards more inclusive elections, we have heard concerns that it could benefit the larger, more established parties and potentially influence the outcome of the elections.

58. We have also received allegations that the lines between political parties and the State are blurred, and credible information that the ruling party is exerting pressure on civil servants dependent on State jobs, sometimes directly and sometimes more subtly.

59. We also heard that vote-buying, which was already present in previous elections, remains endemic in rural, less developed areas, including through indirect methods such as cash incentives and 0% interest loans. We have called on all political actors to refrain from such practices, and for all allegations to be properly investigated.

60. We also noted that party leaders have strong control over party lists, which limits internal democracy.

61. In our statement, we emphasised that the absence of meaningful political discourse indicates that elections are more about personalities than concrete policy platforms. Young people are disinterested in elections because they feel unrepresented and see little difference between the policies of existing political parties.

62. We were made aware of the concentration of media ownership in the hands of private groups with links to political parties. We also understood that online platforms are not regulated, which creates opportunities for manipulation. The recent temporary ban on TikTok highlights concerns about the instrumentalisation of social media and the flow of information in the run-up to elections.

63. We welcomed the fact that several interlocutors mentioned that current legislation providing for a mandatory gender quota ensures adequate female representation on electoral lists.

64. Our interlocutors expressed confidence in the CEC's ability to work transparently and in co-operation with civil society. However, we regretted that there would be no large-scale observation by civil society at polling stations on election day, thus likely to reduce the transparency of the electoral process.

65. While we recognised that some of these issues may be difficult to address before election day, we urged the authorities and all election stakeholders to address those that could still be resolved.

5. Election day observation

66. On election day, around 350 international observers were deployed by the IEOM to cover approximately 1 350 polling stations and almost 100 counting centres, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the electoral process. PACE teams were deployed in Tirana and the surrounding area, as well as several other cities and their outskirts, including Dibër, Durrës, Elbasan, Krujë and Lezha.

67. Most members of the PACE delegation concluded that the elections were well organised and that the voting process was calm and transparent. Observers were given access to observe the entire process. However, procedures were not always followed.

68. PACE members noted the low turnout and suggested this was due to general dissatisfaction with politicians across the board. They also noted that in most polling stations there were observers from the SP and the DP, but not from civil society. One team witnessed the electronic identity-checking device malfunctioning, which led to a 30-minute delay in the opening of voting. Another team observed voters instructing their family members on for whom to vote. Some members received confirmation from voters about the pressure they had been under before election day, including credible details about how this pressure had been exerted, such as personal telephone calls. This information had already been received by the PACE delegation during the pre-electoral mission and briefings.

69. Access for disabled voters was an issue, as more than half of polling stations visited by IEOM observers did not allow these voters to access them independently.

70. The PACE teams direct observations are consistent with the findings of the IEOM, which reported that election day was calm in most areas and transparent, but with a lack of adherence to procedures in many voting centres. While voting was assessed generally positively in 95% of observations, there was a fairly high number of negative assessments, largely regarding procedural shortcomings, and some pressure on voters. Serious irregularities that were observed included a significant number of incidents of intimidation and party observers and affiliates interfering in the process, inducements and allegations of vote buying. Further, the secrecy of the vote was frequently compromised due to the layout of polling stations, overcrowding, and interference. Electronic voting generally proceeded without hindrance, though many voters appeared unfamiliar with the process, and some electoral officials were not adequately trained or lacked clarity on their roles. The electronic transmission of results from e-voting centres was cancelled, and a manual transmission was conducted at the district level instead. While the counting proceeded in an orderly manner in many places, not all IEOM observers had full access to the process and noted some procedural shortcomings and a chaotic atmosphere in some locations.

6. Outcome of the elections

71. According to data available on the CEC website, the results are as follows: the SP secured 83 mandates (53.27%), while the DP won 50 (32,93%). The remainder of the seats were distributed among the Social Democratic Party with three mandates, the Opportunity Party with two, and the “Albania Becomes” initiative and the Together Movement Party, which secured one mandate each.

72. The SP won the diaspora vote with 61.14%, followed by the DP coalition with 23.54%, and “Albania Becomes” with 7.4%.

73. According to the CEC, a total of 339 893 profiles of out-of-country voters were created on the electronic registration platform, with 245 935 applications approved for voting. Of these, 227 097 envelopes were successfully delivered to voters, representing a 92% delivery rate. The CEC received 202 309 completed ballots, which accounts for 82,2% of approved applications. Voters participated from 85 countries worldwide, with the largest concentrations in Italy, Greece, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The logistical process involved 680 personnel over a six-month period, with 14 designated ballot boxes and continuous 24/7 video monitoring.

74. The turnout was 42.21% compared to 46,29% in the 2021 parliamentary elections.

75. The outcome of the elections in number of seats reflects the fact that the electoral system favours big parties over small ones. The ruling SP’s 53,27% vote share translates into 83 seats in the 140-seat legislature. This is the largest majority ever enjoyed by the party since 1997, which is one seat short of the three-fifths majority that would give it considerable power in parliament without having to seek any support from other parties. This electoral system therefore appears to reinforce the deep-rooted “winner-takes-all” culture of political competition, leaving limited space for new political actors to emerge.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

76. The IEOM concluded that the 2025 parliamentary elections were competitive and professionally conducted but took place in a highly polarised environment and that contestants did not enjoy a level playing field. Still, candidates were generally able to campaign freely although some reported facing intimidation. The electoral administration managed the process in an inclusive and transparent manner. The ruling party benefited from widespread use of administrative resources during the campaign, creating an undue advantage of incumbency. There were also numerous allegations of pressure on voters, especially public employees. Further, the electoral legislation and its narrow interpretation by the election administration did not prevent abusive practices. Concentration of media ownership undermining the plurality of news sources, along with self-censorship among journalists and the two largest parties dominating the news coverage, limited opportunity for voters to make an informed choice. The active use of online social networks by the contestants, amplified the strong confrontational discourse, and no authority was designated to detect harmful manipulative content. The new co-ordination mechanism among institutions to investigate and prosecute electoral crimes is a welcome development, but follow-through is necessary to address persistent concerns of electoral malpractice. Election day was generally calm and well organised but there was a frequent lack of adherence to procedures, and the day was marked by a number of incidents of intimidation and inducement of voters and some procedural and transparency shortcomings in the vote count.

77. The diaspora vote marks an important milestone in Albania's democratic history. Out-of-country voting, introduced for the first time for these elections, enabled Albanians living abroad to contribute to their country's development as citizens, in addition to their significant economic contributions. Their voting was well managed, despite the late political agreement and adoption of this measure, as well as some organisational issues which will need to be properly assessed.

78. The shortcomings observed raised some questions about the integrity of the electoral process. In this context, our delegation valued the work of the Albanian “triumvirate” — the SPAK, the General Prosecutor's Office and the CEC — in effectively co-ordinating their efforts to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process.

79. However, progress is still needed in the broader political culture to strengthen public trust and ensure good governance reaches all levels of society, which starts with elections fully complying with European standards. In particular, the issues mentioned below must be highlighted.

80. A number of shortcomings and ambiguities reduce the clarity of the legal framework and create uncertainty in its implementation in both letter and spirit.

81. While some Venice Commission and ODIHR recommendations were addressed, the majority of long-standing recommendations, including those related to the composition of lower-level election commissions, interim reporting on campaign finance, misuse of administrative resources and provisions to provide a conducive media environment, including removing criminal liability for defamation, have not yet been addressed.

82. The parliament is elected through a modified electoral system combining closed and lists subject to preference voting which was introduced ahead of these elections. The system appears to favour the two largest parties, and it limits the impact of preference voting, enabling the party leaders to retain significant control over parliamentary representation, in part due to the lack of internal party democracy.

83. There were some disruptions caused by the late replacement of members nominated by political parties, especially for voting centre members in the days leading up to the election.

84. Despite efforts made by the CEC to improve accessibility at voting centres for persons with disabilities, accessibility problems remain in some places.

85. During the campaign, the playing field was uneven. The ruling party benefitted from the widespread use of administrative resources and institutional leverage, including the waiving of a large number of State fines announced shortly before election day, and senior government officials engaged in a high number of official events that often overlapped with campaign messaging, blurring the line between State and party.

86. There was a large number of credible allegations of pressure on public employees, cases of intimidation of opposition supporters and the misuse of patronage networks. There were also reports of vote-buying, attempts to unduly influence marginalised voters, and alleged influence of criminal elements on some political parties.

87. Campaigning on social networks was not regulated, and no authority was designated to monitor it. Despite most political parties signing a Code of Conduct on Digital Campaigns, several contestants disseminated divisive or manipulative content, while third-party accounts reportedly used co-ordinated inauthentic behaviour on online platforms to amplify attacks against the opposition.

88. We heard that the government’s ban on TikTok as of 6 March 2025 – which was justified by the authorities by the lack of filters for harmful content – was perceived by some interlocutors as a manipulation by the ruling party to limit some candidates' campaign opportunities.

89. Women’s political participation has grown in recent years, yet their advancement remains constrained by entrenched structural barriers, particularly weak internal party democracy and limited access to funding.

90. Only limited changes to campaign finance have been enacted since 2020. Key Venice Commission and ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed and shortcomings in the regulatory framework impact the transparency of campaign finance and the equality of opportunities for parties and candidates.

91. The media environment remained highly constrained, with the independence, diversity, and integrity of news content undermined by non-transparent financing, concentrated ownership, interference in editorial autonomy, and political influence.

92. A lack of funding for local civil society, notably from international donors, limited its capacity to undertake a comprehensive observation of these elections, reducing the level of scrutiny of the election process.

93. Election day was calm in most areas and transparent, but with a lack of adherence to procedures in many voting centres. There was a fairly high number of negative assessments, largely regarding procedural shortcomings, and some pressure on voters. Serious irregularities that were observed included a significant number of incidents of intimidation and party observers and affiliates interfering in the process, inducements and allegations of vote buying. Further, the secrecy of the vote was frequently compromised due to the layout of polling stations, overcrowding, and interference. More than half of the polling stations observed were not adequately accessible for persons with disabilities to vote independently. Electronic voting generally proceeded without hindrance, though many voters appeared unfamiliar with the process, and some electoral officials were not adequately trained or lacked clarity on their roles. The electronic transmission of results from e-voting centres was cancelled, and a manual transmission was conducted at the district level instead. While the counting proceeded in an orderly manner in many places, not all IEOM observers had full access to the process and noted some procedural shortcomings and a chaotic atmosphere in some locations.

94. The Assembly calls on the Albanian authorities to demonstrate strong and genuine political will to address the shortcomings identified during the election observation process. This is crucial to ensure the alignment with European standards in electoral processes. This should be followed up in the framework of the Assembly's post-monitoring dialogue and electoral co-operation programmes.

95. In particular, the Assembly calls on the Albanian authorities to prioritise the following measures and to:

– address the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations in a comprehensive and inclusive manner and review the campaign finance rules in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission and Group of States against Corruption (GRECO);

– depoliticise the electoral administration, especially at lower levels, to prevent frequent, last-minute and discretionary dismissal of appointees by political parties, ensure sufficient time for training and preparation and strengthen professionalism of election officers on election day for greater trust in the electoral process;

– take resolute action to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process, in particular adopt measures to prevent vote-buying, pressure on both public and private sector employees, undue influence on marginalised voters, misuse of administrative resources and abuse of State resources by parties in power during electoral campaigns and the alleged influence of criminal elements, as well as the risk of their infiltration into the electoral process;

– take action to clearly separate the ruling party from the State;

– adopt measures to increase political education, civic engagement and access to political representation for young people;

– strengthen the capacity of the SPAK to effectively fight corruption and organised crime, including in the context of elections;

– carry out a proper assessment of the out-of-country voting which was introduced for the first time and identify areas for improvement.

96. In the spirit of the Reykjavík Summit of Heads of State and Government and the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, the Assembly urges the Albanian authorities to take concrete steps to safeguard and strengthen democracy, uphold good governance, and "encourage democratic participation at all levels through free and fair elections".

97. The Assembly is ready to support this process, working within the framework of its post-monitoring procedure and in close co-operation with the Venice Commission.

Appendix 1 – Composition of the ad hoc committee

Chairperson: Mr Simone BILLI, Italy

Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC)

– Mr Jone BLIKRA, Norway
– Mr Cerni ESCALE CABRE, Andorra
– Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, Spain *
– Mr Axel SCHÄFER, Germany
– Ms Céline THIEBAULT-MARTINEZ, France

Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)

– Ms Borianna ÅBERG, Sweden
– Mr Branislav BORENOVIĆ, Bosnia and Herzegovina
– Ms Linda Hofstad HELLELAND, Norway
– Mr Pablo HISPÁN, Spain
– Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI, Poland

European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates (ECPA)

– Mr Simone BILLI, Italy *
– Dame Karen BRADLEY, United Kingdom
– Mr Malte KAUFMANN, Germany

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

– Mr François BONNEAU, France
– Ms Valentina GRIPPO, Italy *
– Ms Rian VOGELS, Netherlands

Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)

– Mr Andrej HUNKO, Germany *

Co-rapporteur AS/MON (ex officio)

– Mr Ionuț-Marian STROE, Romania, EPP/CD

Venice Commission

– Mr Saša ZAGORC, Substitute Member in respect of Slovenia
– Mr Domenico VALLARIO, Venice Commission Secretariat

Accompanying person

– Mr Stepan DENEGA, accompanying Mr Jan Filip Libicki

Secretariat

– Mr Bogdan TORCĂTORIU, Senior Elections Officer, Elections Division, Secretary of the ad hoc committee

– Ms Carine ROLLER-KAUFMAN, Assistant, Elections Division

*(*members of the pre-electoral delegation)*

Appendix 2 – Programme of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thursday, 3 April 2025

09:00-10:00 Delegation meeting with the participation of Mr Olsi Dekovi, Deputy Head of the Council of Europe Office in Tirana

10:00-11:00 Meeting with Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, and Mr Mark Stevens, Deputy Head

11:00-13:00 Meeting with members of the diplomatic corps in Tirana:
- Germany: Mr Thilo Schroeter, Chargé d'affaires
- Italy: Mr Luigi Mattirolo, Deputy Head of Mission
- Romania: Mr Alin Barbu, Minister plenipotentiary
- Spain: Mr Gabriel Cremades, Ambassador
- EU Delegation: Mr Silvio Gonzato, Ambasador, and Ms Artes Butka, Political Officer
- OSCE Presence in Albania: Mr Michel Tarran, Ambassador, Mr Blerim Vela, Head of Democratization Department, and Mr Florian Hobdari, National Elections Adviser

14:30-15:30 Meeting with representatives of the civil society:
- Ms Gerta Meta, Association for Democratic Culture
- Mr Dritan Taulla, Deputy Chair of KRIIK, and Ms Antuela Male, Election Analyst
- Mr Emanuel Xhindi, Albanian Helsinki Committee
- Mr Rigels Xhemollari and Mr Migen Qiraxhi, Civic Resistance
- Mr Erjon Tase, School of Political Studies

15:30-16:30 Meeting with media representatives:
- Mr Lutfi Dervishi, Media Expert
- Mr Koloreto Cukali, Albanian Media Council
- Ms Kristina Voko, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)

16:30-17:15 Meeting with representatives of the Audio-visual Media Authority (AMA):
- Ms Armela Krasniqi, Chair
- Ms Ronelda Rrapollari, Secretary General
- Ms Alida Cenaj, Advisor
- Ms Donika Daci, Director of Legal Unit
- Mr Arben Muka, Director of the Monitoring and Analysis Unit

and with Mr Alteo Hysi, Director General, Media and Information Agency

17:15-17:45 Meeting with representatives of the National Bureau of Investigation – Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)
- Ms Aida Hajnaj (Veizaj), Director
- Ms Sadleva Bodo

Friday, 4 April 2025

09:15-10:00 Meeting with Ms Elisa Spiropali, Speaker of the Parliament, with the participation of the Albanian delegation to the Assembly

10:00-12:00 Meetings with leaders and representatives of the main parliamentary groups

10:00-10:30 Socialist Party (SP):

Ms Blerina Gjylameti, Head of the Albanian delegation to the Assembly, Ms Klotilda Bushka, Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs and member of the Albanian delegation to the Assembly, Ms Etilda Gjonaj, Vice Chair of the Committee on EU Integration, member of the Albanian delegation to the Assembly

10:30-11:00 The Alliance for Change:

Mr Fatmir Mediu, Mr Agron Duka, Mr Vangjel Dule

	11:00-11:30 Democracy and Integration:
	Ms Andia Ulliri
	11:30-12:00 Democratic Party (DP):
	Mr Oerd Bylykbashi, Vice Chair; Ms Albana Vokshi, Vice Chair (member of Albanian delegation to the Assembly), Ms Jorida Tabaku, Chair of the Committee on EU Integration (substitute member of the Albanian delegation to the Assembly)
12:00-12:45	Meeting with Mr Ilirjan Celibashi, State Commissioner of Elections, and members of the Central Electoral Commission
14:00-15:40	Meetings with leaders and representatives of the main extra-parliamentary political parties:
	14:00-14:20 Mr Agron Shehaj, Opportunity Party
	14:40-15:00 Mr Endri Hasa, Chairman of the Euro-Atlantic Coalition, and Mr Ibri Sako, Legal Representative, Euro-Atlantic Democratic Party
	15:00-15:20 Mr Enkelejd Alibeaj and Mr Dashamir Shehi, Right for Development Party
	15:20-15:40 Mr Enri Shabani and Mr Adriatik Lapaj, “Albania Becomes”
16:00-17:00	Delegation meeting and preparation of a statement

Appendix 3 – Statement of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

In Tirana, PACE pre-electoral delegation hopes that the 11 May parliamentary elections in Albania will confirm the country's democratic orientation

A four-member delegation* from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), led by Simone Billi (Italy, ECPA), made a pre-electoral visit to Albania on 3-4 April 2025 to assess the electoral campaign and the political climate ahead of the parliamentary elections on 11 May 2025.

The PACE pre-election delegation identified several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure democratic processes and fair and competitive elections.

The fight against corruption is an important and laudable goal. However, it is important that it is not seen as interfering with the democratic nature of the electoral process by favouring one political party or another, which could undermine public confidence in the fight against corruption and trust in the electoral process.

The PACE delegation heard that there is a deep-rooted 'winner-takes-all' culture of political competition in Albania, where the aim is not to foster future co-operation but to minimise the power of competitors, leaving little room for constructive dialogue in the future.

The delegation noted that, for the first time, Albania will use out-of-country voting. While this is a positive step towards more inclusive elections, concerns were expressed that it could benefit the larger, traditional parties and potentially influence the outcome of the elections.

The delegation is concerned about allegations of blurred lines between political parties and the State. Information was received about pressure being exerted by the ruling party, sometimes directly and sometimes more subtly, on civil servants dependent on state jobs. This further distorts the playing field. The delegation also heard that vote-buying – already present in previous elections – remains endemic in rural, less developed areas (including through indirect methods such as cash incentives, 0 per cent interest loans, etc.). The delegation calls on all political actors to refrain from such practices. All allegations should be properly investigated.

The delegation notes that party leaders have strong control over party lists, which limits internal democracy.

The lack of real political debate shows that elections are more about personalities than clear policy platforms. Young people lack interest in elections as they feel unrepresented and see little difference between the platforms of existing political parties.

The delegation was informed about the concentration of media ownership in the hands of private groups close to political parties. There is no regulation of online platforms, creating opportunities for manipulation. The recent temporary ban on TikTok highlights concerns about the instrumentalisation of social media and the flow of information in the run-up to elections.

The delegation welcomed the fact that several interlocutors mentioned that the current legislation providing for a mandatory gender quota ensures adequate representation of women on electoral lists.

Interlocutors expressed confidence in the ability of the Central Electoral Commission to work transparently and in co-operation with civil society.

The PACE delegation was saddened to learn that there will be no large-scale observation by civil society observers at polling stations on election day, as this is likely to reduce the transparency of the electoral process, while some interlocutors expressed fears of voter pressure and intimidation on election day.

The delegation recognises that some of these issues may be difficult to address before election day but urges the authorities and all election stakeholders to address those that can still be resolved.

In Tirana, the delegation met with the Speaker of Parliament, leaders and representatives of the main parliamentary groups and the main extra-parliamentary political parties, as well as members of the Albanian delegation to PACE. It also met with the Head and Deputy Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, the State Election Commissioner and members of the Central Election Commission, representatives of the diplomatic community, civil society and the media, representatives of the Albanian Media Agency, the Media and Information Agency and the National Bureau of Investigation Specialised Structure for Combating Corruption and Organised Crime.

PACE – which represents parliamentarians from 46 European nations – is observing the elections in Albania as part of its post-monitoring dialogue with the country. A full Assembly delegation of 22 members, accompanied by legal experts from the Venice Commission, will travel to the country to observe the vote on 11 May as part of an international election observation mission, together with the ODIHR and delegations from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament. PACE will discuss its conclusions in due course.

Appendix 4 – Programme of the meetings of the PACE delegation and of the IEOM (9 to 12 May 2025)

Friday, 9 May 2025

09:00-10:00 PACE delegation meeting
- Welcome by Mr Simone Billi, Head of Delegation
- Presentation by Mr Olsi Dekovi, Deputy Head of the Council of Europe Office in Tirana
- Presentation by Mr Saša Zagorc, Representative of the Venice Commission
- Presentation of the programme by the secretariat

Joint Parliamentary Briefing Programme

10:30-10:50 Welcome and introductory remarks:
- Ms Farah Karimi, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers
- Mr Björn Söder, Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Delegation
- Mr Simone Billi, Head of the PACE Delegation
- Mr Michael Gahler, Head of the European Parliament Delegation

10:50-11:30 Introduction on the country:
- Ambassador Michel Tarran, Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania
- Mr Olsi Dekovi, Deputy Head of the Council of Europe Office in Tirana
- Mr Silvio Gonzato, EU Ambassador to Albania

11:45-13:45 Briefing by the ODIHR election observation mission:
- Welcome and overview of the EOM's work – Mr Lamberto Zannier, Ambassador, Head of Mission
- Political overview, the Contestants and the Election Campaign – Ms Julia Manchin, Political Analyst
- Media – Ms Elma Šehalić, Media Analyst
- Legal Framework, Electoral dispute resolutions – Ms Smaranda Săndulescu, Legal Analyst
- Election Administration – Mr Rishi Datta, Election Analyst, and Ms Liisa Past, Election Technologies Analyst
- Security – Mr Davor Corluka, Security Expert

15:15-16:45 Elections and political context:
- Ms Ines Leskaj, Executive Director, Awen Network
- Mr Bledi Taho, Executive Director, Institute for Romani Culture in Albania
- Mr Dritan Taulla, Deputy Chair, KRIIK Albania
- Ms Edlira Çepani, Chairwoman, Women's Network "Equality in Decision Making"
- Mr Erjon Tase, Executive Director, Academy for Political Studies

17:00-17:30 Election administration:
- Mr Ilirjan Celibashi, Commissioner of the Central Election Commission

17:30-18:30 Election administration:
- Mr Altin Dumani, Head of SPAK (Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure)
- Mr Olsian Çela, General Prosecutor

Saturday, 10 May 2025

09:00-10:00 Campaign and election coverage panel:
- Ms Kristina Voko, Executive Director, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)
- Ms Armela Krasniqi, Chair, Audio-visual Media Authority

	– Mr Osman Stafa-News24
10:00-10:20	Mr Edi Rama, candidate, Chairman of the Socialist Party
10:35-10:55	Mr Sali Berisha, candidate, Chairman of the Democratic Party
11:00-12:15	Candidates/Parties contesting the elections: – "Albania Becomes", Adriatik Lapaj – "Republican Party", Fatmir Mediu – "Together Movement", Jani Marka – "Opportunity Movement", Agron Shehaj – "Euro-Atlantic Coalition", Endri Hasa
12:15-13:15	Briefing by the ODIHR election observation mission (continued): – Election day procedures – Mr Rishi Datta, Election Analyst, and Ms Liisa Past, Election Technologies Analyst – Short Term Observers reporting – Mr Anders Eriksson and Mr Max Bader, Statistical Analysts – Briefing by Long Term Observers deployed in Tirana

Sunday, 11 May 2025

07:00-24:00	Observation of the opening of the polling stations, of the voting and of the counting

Monday, 12 May 2025

08:00-10:00	Meeting of the PACE delegation (debriefing and preparation of a statement)
14:00	Joint press conference

Appendix 5 – Press release of the International Election Observation Mission

Albania's parliamentary elections competitive and well run but lacked level playing field, international observers say

Elections to Albania's parliament were competitive and professionally managed, the authorities rose to the challenge of organising out-of-country voting for the first time and candidates could mostly campaign freely, but they were marked by widespread misuse of public resources and institutional power by the ruling party, while numerous reports of pressure on public employees and other voters as well as cases of intimidation were of concern, international observers said in a statement today.

The joint observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament (EP), found that the legal framework forms an adequate basis for holding democratic elections, although the need remains for comprehensive electoral reform. Shortcomings and ambiguities in the legal framework created uncertainty and limited accountability. Many longstanding recommendations by international observers remain unaddressed, raising concerns about a lack of political will.

"The legal framework and institutional capacity enabled well-run elections, reinforcing a solid democratic foundation, but voters were not given a chance to hear a genuine exchange of political ideas," said Farah Karimi, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers. "The campaign was focused on hostile and personal attacks, especially by leaders of the two main parties, rather than on solution-based debate. That deepened public distrust in politics. The country deserves honest and constructive politics not just on election day, but every day."

Some 3.7 million voters were registered to vote in yesterday's elections, including almost 250,000 registered abroad. Overall, the voter registration process was transparent and the inclusion of out-of-country voters for the first time marked an important step toward broader electoral participation. Albania is continuing to roll out the use of new technologies through biometric identification of voters and electronic voting. Observers noted there was generally high confidence in the use of technology, although some concerns were expressed, mainly by the opposition. Preparations for the elections were efficient and election day itself was generally well assessed, but procedures were often not followed and a number of cases of intimidation and interference in the process were observed.

Simone Billi (Italy, ECPA), Head of the PACE delegation, said: "I recognise the valuable work of the Albanian triumvirate – SPAK, the General Prosecutor's Office, and the CEC – to effectively coordinate efforts to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process, and the inclusion of the diaspora vote marks an important milestone in Albania's democratic history. However, we see that progress is still needed in the broader political culture to strengthen public trust and ensure that good governance reaches all levels of society."

The campaign was characterised by a confrontational and polarizing tone, with the two main political parties using divisive language and attempting to unduly influence voters. Observers noted the misuse of state resources, with senior government representatives engaging in numerous official events that often overlapped with campaign messaging and included the announcement of social benefit programmes and infrastructure projects, giving the ruling party an undue advantage.

"The introduction of out-of-country voting is a commendable development that enables diaspora participation in elections. However, despite recent changes to the legal framework, some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed," stated Björn Söder, head of the OSCE PA delegation. "Closer alignment with international democratic standards would signal a continued commitment to European values and help reinforce public trust in electoral processes."

The independence and diversity of the media were undermined by untransparent financing, ownership concentration, and interference with editorial autonomy, which led to self-censorship among journalists and had a negative impact on the amount and quality of information available to the public. The lack of independent reporting also hindered the media's oversight role. In addition, the observation mission's media monitoring showed that the two largest political parties dominated the news coverage.

"Albania's commitment to a future in the EU is an appreciated and rare element of national consensus. Whichever of the two main parties emerges victorious in this election will prove this. However, the conduct of this election should be seen not only through the prism of a well-run election day, but also factor in unilateral steps ahead of the election that impacted the level playing field," said Michael Gahler, head of the European Parliament delegation. "As elections are a central instrument of democracy all relevant stakeholders must

continue to seek to obtain broad consensus on the electoral framework and strive to increase trust in its conduct. Furthermore I call on the new government to build on success already achieved, such as in the field of the judiciary."

The authority responsible for resolving electoral complaints (CSC) dealt with cases transparently and in public sessions, although its narrow interpretation of the rules on the use of public resources meant that such practices often went unsanctioned. The authority working to combat corruption and organised crime (SPAK) played a positive role in investigating electoral corruption, while closer coordination between SPAK, the election administration, and the General Prosecutor's Office improved information sharing on election-related crimes.

"While these elections were well managed, our long-term observers witnessed widespread intimidation and abuse of public resources during the campaign," said Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, who headed the ODIHR election observation mission. "I welcome the new coordination mechanism to combat electoral crimes, as we are witnessing extreme political polarization resulting in excessive pressure on voters and on the electoral process itself. This undermines the positive steps once seen in Albania, and may negatively affect progress towards the achievement of the country's long-term goals."

The international election observation to the Albanian parliamentary elections totalled 365 observers from 47 countries, composed of 238 ODIHR-deployed experts and long-term observers, 97 parliamentarians and staff from the OSCE PA, 22 from PACE, and 12 from the EP.