

**SHOQATA PER KULTURE DEMOKRATIKE  
SOCIETY FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE**

Rruga "Bajram Curri" (perballe kinema Agimit) Tirana, ALBANIA  
Tel & Fax: ++ 355 4 230350/ 247658  
E-mail: shkd@albnet.net

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**SDC REPORT ON LOCAL ELECTIONS 2000**

The Society for Democratic Culture has observed the election process on October 1, 2000, in 32 districts of Albania. In these elections SDC has involved 1300 observers, covering about 25% of the polling stations and including the Central Election Commission and Local Government Election Commissions.

The reports from our observers show that the voting process was normal, quiet and with no major incidents.

SDC has observed the pre-election period and monitored the coverage of the election campaign by the electronic media.

**CAMPAIGN**

The campaign was a positive step compared to previous elections. The leaders of all parties were able to move freely throughout the country.

This campaign was characterized by a very high aggressiveness of the political parties, which was clearly shown by the hate speech used by their leaders. On the other hand the candidates showed more moderation than their leaders during their own campaigning.

**ELECTRONIC MEDIA COVERAGE**

One of the positive aspects of this campaign was that there was a diversity of media coverage and the political parties didn't have to rely on only one TV or Radio station.

Nevertheless, the electronic media, with a few exceptions, showed a clearly partisan stance. The rules of the game stated that the media had to be unbiased and offer the same access to all parties. Although the plurality of TV stations allowed both sides to have coverage, most stations were clearly biased toward one side or the other, and therefore were in violation of the law.

Because the stations that support the government are nationwide in coverage, and those that support the opposition are regional, the scales were visibly tilted in favor of the government.

As in previous years, the activities small parties still were not generally covered by the electronic media. This was particularly the case for those small parties that were not in coalition with either of the two major parties.

## **ELECTION DAY**

*Voters lists.* In the majority of the VCCs there were problems with the voters lists. In some of the centers, the voters had their enumeration coupons and Voter Cards but their names were not on the list.

In response to this problem, the Central Election Commission stated that it believed many of these voters to be on lists in other polling stations, and suggested that voters go to other polling stations in their municipality or commune to check if their names appeared.

*VCCs.* Another concern was the lack of training of the VCC members. In many cases the VCC members turned to SDC observers asking advice about proper procedures, especially during the counting of ballots. There was a lack of consistency in the application of procedures by different VCCs, e.g. the case of the people who were not on the voters' list. Some VCCs allowed them to vote if they had the coupon, the Voter Card, and in several cases without either of the two. This confusion was caused in part by the failure of the CEC to communicate its decisions and directives on election day to the LGEC's and the VCCs. The VCCs should issue the same instructions to voters as those issued by the CEC. The VCCs were not always able to provide the voters with accurate information about this problem.

*Counting.* The process of ballot counting generally went fine and there was consensus among the VCC members about the procedures. The delays in the process were caused by the lack of training of the VCC members, who had to continuously refer to the Electoral Code to clarify the steps.

*Invalid ballots.* A high percentage of the invalidated ballots clearly expressed the will of the voter. In many cases the voters marked the ballot outside the box close to the party name. The VCCs should be instructed to count the ballots as valid as long as they clearly express the choice of the voter.

*Observers.* In the majority of polling stations visited by SDC observers, observers were given complete access to all aspects of the voting and counting processes. In a few cases, however, observers reported that they were harassed by the observers of political parties or VCC members who said they had no right to be present. The most serious case was in Shkoder where all observers, including SDC observers and the observers of political parties, were expelled from 4 polling stations during the counting process.

In several cases the observers of political parties interfered with the voting process and the counting of ballots.

*Other technical difficulties.* Delays in the voting process were also caused by the high influx of voters into what were often small polling stations, lack of sufficient secret booths, and the fact that ballots had very small print.

SDC would like to express its appreciation to the Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy for supporting the election monitoring effort, and IREX for their support of the electronic media monitoring project.

**SDC National Staff**