



Helsinki Commission Briefing

“Albania’s Elections and the Challenge of Democratic Transition”

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1539 Longworth House Office Building

Parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place in Albania on June 28, just a little over three weeks from today.

There is concern that these elections will not meet OSCE standards. We will hear our panelists talk about these concerns and the prospects for these elections. The Helsinki Commission has been in contact with the Albanian Embassy, which has been informing us of efforts to address outstanding electoral issues. First among these problems seems to be the question of voter identification, and the large number of voters who do not have a passport and have not yet received the new identification cards enabling them to vote.

I will not go into further details regarding this election. I will leave that to our panelists. I do, however, want to express regret over the very fact that such election issues continue to exist and to mar Albania’s democratic credentials. Even if a last-minute rush to correct things ultimately proves successful, it will only repeat a disturbing pattern from previous elections of not taking action quickly enough to make a real difference for the next, regularly scheduled election four years later.

Ultimately, it is neither the ruling parties nor those in the opposition that suffer the full consequences of these delays. It is the voter. A citizen who is eligible to vote for his or her representative in parliament not only has a right to do so that must be respected, but the citizen should also have a certain expectation that voting actually means something and can make a difference in their own lives. Even if everything goes smoothly on June 28, it is unlikely to do much to help the people of Albania develop confidence in the system. This is a serious weak spot in Albania’s democracy.

The Helsinki Commission has also traditionally used upcoming elections in Albania as an opportunity to take a closer look at developments in that country as a whole. The Commission has, therefore, asked our panelists to look not only at the elections but also at broader trends and developments in the country, such as the development of civil society and efforts to combat corruption.

As we examine the situation in Albania today, it should go without saying that our intent is to be constructive. Going back to its first visit to Albania in 1990, the Helsinki Commission knows as well as any outside party could know the degree to which the country has recovered from an extremely repressive and brutal communist era. The Commission is also aware, and fully supports, the strong bilateral relationship between our two countries. Now, as a NATO member, we can also refer to Albania as a friend and an ally, which it has always been in spirit. This understanding and support for Albania is why we are here today, hoping to encourage progress in a country where the people so clearly deserve it.