

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 312 (2011)¹ Local elections in Albania (8 May 2011)

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:

a. the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) ratified by Albania on 4 April 2000;

b. the Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2011)2 of the Committee of Ministers relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 19 January 2011 and, in particular, its Article 2, paragraph 4, on the Congress' role in the observation of local and regional elections.

2. The Congress welcomes the good co-operation implemented with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) and looks forward to increasing the complementary and harmonised action established.

3. The Congress notes the progress made in general by the Albanian authorities in making the electoral organisation of the municipal elections of the 8 May 2011 as efficient as possible and recognises, in particular, the efforts made for ensuring transparency of the elections. The behaviour of the media, even if few of them were considered independent, was balanced. The voting day procedures were satisfactory and a good co-operative atmosphere was established between the members of the voting centre commissions.

4. Nevertheless, as did the OSCE/ODIHR and other observers, the Congress' delegation noticed several problems and highlighted that future regulatory improvements are needed.

5. In particular, the Congress' delegation:

a. regretted that the electoral campaign, characterised by a strong polarisation of the debates, reflected the extremely tense political situation. This negatively affected the electoral process. The tensions detected during the electoral campaign were confirmed during the long and contested counting process;

b. noted uncertainties with regard to procedures that brought about postponements in opening and closing of the vote;

c. was convinced that the late appointment or last minute change of the election officials considerably affected their training;

d. noted that disagreements between the members of the various electoral commissions were frequent and the members had to consult their respective parties before taking position on the contested cases. This very often prevented the fulfilment of the deadlines established;

e. regretted that in Tirana the atmosphere was particularly tense due to the strong political polarisation;

f. believed that the extremely long counting system was, in Tirana, a source of increased conflict. The length of the counting and the consequent failure to announce the final results, put in danger the trust that the citizens should have had in the fairness of the elections. Both partisan interpretations of the electoral code and fairness of the counting were contested.

6. The Congress deplores the lack of constructive dialogue between parties and the deterioration of the relations between political actors whereas, in the interest of local communities and of good governance, efforts should be made to accept all constructive decisions and to go beyond partisan positions.

7. Taking into account the above, the Congress asks the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to:

a. transmit the present recommendation and its explanatory memorandum to the Albanian authorities, inviting them to consider the Congress' suggestions and in particular to review the electoral code if required by the international standards or by the particular difficulties encountered;

b. support the Council of Europe's post-election action plan for Albania and fully involve the Congress in it;

c. forward the present recommendation and its explanatory memorandum to the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Commissioner for Human Rights, for possible future joint actions in favour of Albania.

8. The Congress also invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take into account this recommendation within its monitoring activities on Albania.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 19 October 2011 and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2011, 3rd Sitting (see Document CPL(21)3, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: V. Gebel Germany (L, EPP/CD).