

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT LOCAL ELECTIONS 2015

Tiranë, 22 June 2015

Executive Summary

CFFESD deployed 1000 impartial stationary observers to a random and a representative sample for the country nationwide as well as for the municipalities of Tirana, Shkodër and Durrës. CFFESD's qualitative data is reliable with a 95 % confidence interval, within margin of error (MoE) +/- 4 % nationwide, +/- 5 % for Tirana, +/- 5 % for Durrës and +/- 5 % for Shkodra. CFFESD's response rate from the national sample was 100%, while for the selected municipalities of Tirana, Durrës and Shkodër, the response rate was more than 95%. Missing data was proportionally distributed throughout the country and therefore does not compromise the reliability of data.

- The CFFESD observers did not report significant procedural flaws and/or violations during the Election Day processes (opening of the voting centers, voting procedures and closing of the voting centers).
- The Coalition noted serious violations reported during the Election Day procedures in less than four (4%) of voting centers nationwide. Taking into account MoE of our sample +/- 4%, this is not a statistically significant finding, and cannot be interpreted as a national trend, but rather as a set of isolated incidents.
- The biggest concern during the opening procedures was the failure of commissioners to distribute to party observers copies of security seal logs in 17 % of voting centers.
- In about 85% of voting centers nationwide, opening started either before 7am or on time.
- Almost all voting centers in Albania were equipped with the necessary materials to begin the voting process, such as voter lists, ballot papers, and official stamps.
- The Coalition reports with a great concern that Voting Center Commissions (VCCs) were not in full composition at the opening in about 10% of voting centers in Albania.
- Voter rights infractions, in which a citizen who is registered on a voters' list or alternatively is in possession of a court order and who presents valid identification, was nevertheless refused the right to vote, occurred in fewer than 4% of voting centers. In reverse, voters who didn't have required documentation and where neither in the voters list nor had court order, were nevertheless allowed to vote in less than 3% of voting centers in the country.
- CFFESD observers noted that in one quarter of voting centers nationwide there were instances where voters were not able to find their names in the voters' lists.
- Inking procedures were respected in 93% of cases nationwide.



- The only significant instance of non-observance of closing procedure was allowing voters who arrived to voting centers after 7pm to vote, observed in eight percent (8%) of voting centers nationwide.
- Political party poll-watchers did not submit any official complaints in 93% of voting centers nationwide.
- In 37 % of the Voting Centers nationwide, there were no female members in the Voting Center Commission and in only 15 % of the Voting Centers, nationwide, a woman was chairing the commission.
- The Coalition pointed out to serious shortcomings related to ensuring voters with disabilities the rights to effectively and fully participate in the election - more than 57% of voting centers nationwide, were not physically accessible to voters with disabilities and in 51 % of voting centers nationwide, visually impaired voters could not exercise their voting right independently and in secrecy due to the lack of braille ballots.
- Rights of observers were respected almost in all voting centers throughout the country.
- The poll watchers of the two largest parties, the SP and DP, were represented in about 90% of voting centers, followed by SMI in around 80% of voting centers.

The CFFESD would like to thank all of our observers for volunteering to observe during the 2015 local elections. Ultimately, the further advancement of democracy in Albania will be determined by citizens continuing to be actively engaged in political processes in large numbers and in a variety of ways.

Introduction

Albania's local elections on June 21, 2015 were the first since the European Union (EU) granted candidate status to the country in 2014. The democratic conduct of the elections is seen as a critical benchmark in starting Albania's EU accession negotiations as an official candidate country. These were also the first local elections conducted under the new territorial and administrative reform (TAR) approved by parliament in 2014. The new framework reduces the number of local government units to 61, from 373.

On June 21, 2015, 3,372,471¹ citizens had their opportunity to express their political choices by casting votes in 5,301 voting centers across the country. Citizens elected 61 Mayors and as many local councils consisting of 1,595 councilors for the new expanded municipalities, which will have enhanced power and resources to address the daily needs of citizens.

Mayors are elected through a first-past-the-post-system, in which the candidate with the highest number of votes is declared the winner. Municipal councilors are elected through a

¹ Source: Central Election Commission (CEC) website. See: <http://results.cec.org.al/>



proportional representation system via closed-list ballots, in which the voter selects a candidate list ‘as is’. Political parties, coalitions and independent candidates meeting criteria prescribed by the legislation may stand in the elections. Universal and equal suffrage is guaranteed to citizens 18 and older.

The electoral process is administered by a three-tiered administration: the Central Election Commission (CEC) composed by 7 members; 90 Commissions of Electoral Administration Zones (CEAZs) composed of 720 members; and 5,301 Voting Centre Commissions (VCCs) with 7 commissioners each. There are 90 Ballot Counting Centers (BCCs), one for each Electoral Administration Zone (EAZ), where Counting Teams (CTs) count votes on the EAZ level. With the exception of the CEC Chair, all members in all tiers of electoral administration are nominated by political actors.

The main political contest throughout the country was between the candidates of the Socialist Party (SP) and the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI) - the two main parties in power leading the Alliance for a European Albania (AEA) - and the candidates of the Democratic Party (DP), the biggest opposition party, leading the People’s Alliance for Work and Dignity (PAWD). Fourteen (14) Mayoral independent candidates (proposed by the citizens) ran throughout the country as well. In total, there were 158 candidates running for Mayors, of whom 16 (10.1 %) are women, which speaks to limited opportunities for women to compete for the top municipal position. The total number of candidates running for local councilors were 36,341², out of whom there are 17,137 (49.3%) women.

The official campaign period of 30 days started on May 22 and finished on June 19, to allow for one day of campaign silence prior to election-day itself.

CFFESD election observation mission and methodology

CFFESD election observation methodology encompasses the entirety of the election process, to include monitoring of the pre-election period, Election Day voting, the ballot counting process, and post-election day dispute resolution and vote certification processes.

Pre-election observation

CFFESD deployed 90 trained, independent long-term observers (LTOs) to all 90 Electoral Administrative Zones (EAZs) to observe the pre-election period focusing on the work of electoral administration, campaigning by political parties and independent candidates, as well as the potential abuse of public sources and institutions for electoral purposes.

²Source: CEC website

http://www.cec.org.al/Portals/0/Documents/CEC%202013/Barazia_gjinore/kuota_gjinore_kanidimet_Zgjedhjet_%20Vendore_%202015.pdf

CFFESD reported a largely peaceful campaign environment, although observed, among other detailed findings, that political contestants began campaign activity well before the official start-date of May 22. The one-day period of silence immediately prior to election day was respected.

Election Day observation

CFFESD observers deployed to a statistically representative sample of voting centers around the country that enables CFFESD to assess the conduct of opening, voting, and closing of voting centers as a whole.

In using statistically-based observation (SBO) methodology, CFFESD deployed 500 trained, certified, and accredited citizen monitors to a random and a representative sample of 500 voting centers as stationary observers. CFFESD oversampled municipalities of Tirana, Shkodra and Durrës with additional 500 observers bringing local level samples to 270 in Tirana, 150 in Shkodër and 180 in Durrës.

Such methodology allowed the Coalition to extrapolate direct observation findings to the entire country, as well as to the three above-mentioned municipalities. It means that the Coalition was in a position to assess the quality of electoral process in the entire country and not only in the polling stations assessed by stationary observers. CFFESD's qualitative data are reliable with a 95 % confidence interval, within margin of error +/- 4 % nationwide, +/- 5 % for Tirana, +/- 5 % for Durrës and +/- 5 % for Shkodra.

CFFESD observers assessed the entirety of the voting process, from the opening to the finalization of voting center closing procedures. CFFESD information on the conduct of election day processes is accurate within the margin of error.

CFFESD's observation efforts were supported by 63 field coordinators, 50 operators in the Tirana call-center, and election experts at CFFESD's Tirana headquarters.

Counting process observation

CFFESD has continued its observation covering all the ninety (90) ballot counting centers throughout the country, accessing the quality and transparency of the counting process. CFFESD observers will monitor the entire counting process starting from the reception of the materials by the CEAZ to the tabulation of results. The CFFESD did not monitor the process of transporting the ballot boxes from voting centers to counting centers.

Communication

CFFESD regularly informed the public about pre-election day developments. This preliminary report is focused on the election day processes (opening, voting, and closing of voting centers). CFFESD will publish a final report assessing the entirety of the local election process, including ballot counting and tabulation, dispute resolution, and vote certification.



Election Day Findings

CFFESD would like to underline that Election Day is seminal but not comprehensive of the entirety of the election process. The quality of the entire election cannot be assessed only by taking into account election day findings. Therefore, this preliminary report focuses on the quality of Election Day processes. The assessment of the overall quality of the election processes will be evaluated in the final report.

CFFESD's response rate from the national sample was 100%, while for the selected municipalities of Tirana, Durrës and Shkodër, the response rate was more than 95%. Missing data was proportionally distributed throughout the country and therefore does not compromise the reliability of data.

Opening of the Voting Centers

The opening procedure largely proceeded in an orderly manner, with the notable exception of delayed center openings and few procedural problems.

CFFESD observers did not report significant procedural flaws aside from the failure of commissioners, in 17% of voting centers, to distribute to party observers copies of security seal logs containing verifiable data for the integrity of each ballot box. Seal logs allow for confirmation of ballot box integrity upon receipt at CEAZs. A higher trend was witnessed in Tirana and Durrës municipalities (22%), while the situation in Shkodra is significantly better with 7% of voting centers facing this problem. The distribution of seal logs is a requirement and if not distributed properly it impairs the ability of party observers to verify security seals in the counting and appeals process. This situation can undermine confidence in the electoral results, in particular, of independent candidates and political parties without commissioners.

In about 85% of voting centers nationwide, opening started either slightly before 7am or on time. However, in Tirana and Durrës, 79% and 77% of voting centers respectively opened either before 7am or on time, while in Shkodra the number of voting centers that opened either before 7am or on time is at 71%, which is significantly lower in comparison to the national percentage.

Almost all voting centers in Albania were equipped with the necessary materials to begin the voting process, such as voter lists, ballot papers, and official stamps, which is the same trend that was witnessed in municipalities of Tirana, Shkodra and Durrës. The Coalition reported with a great concern that 10% of voting centers did not have full member composition at the center opening. This percentage is slightly higher in Tirana at 16% of voting centers, followed by 12% in Durrës, while the situation in Shkodra was somewhat better at 8% of voting centers.

CFFESD observers reported serious violations, including campaigning within the range of 150 meters around voting centers, in less than 1% of voting centers. This is not statistically significant as it falls within the margin of error, and cases should be treated as isolated incidents. The same trend was observed in the municipalities of Tirana, Durrës and Shkodra during the opening procedure.



From the procedural point of view, slightly more than half of voting centers nationwide respected all key opening procedure requirements³, as observed by CFFESD monitors. A similar trend was observed in municipalities of Tirana, Shkodra and Durrës.

Voting Procedures

CFFE observed that voting procedures were conducted largely peacefully in voting centers throughout the country, without major irregularities that could influence the outcome of the elections. With the exception of a few isolated incidents, voters were able to cast their ballots in an atmosphere free from intimidation and violence inside voting centers.

Voter rights infractions, in which a citizen who is registered on a voters' list or alternatively is in possession of a court order and who presents valid identification, was nevertheless refused the right to vote, occurred in fewer than 4% of voting centers. In reverse, voters who didn't have required documentation and where neither in the voters list nor had court order, where nevertheless allowed to vote in less than 3% of voting centers in the country.

CFFESD observers noted in almost one-quarter of voting centers nationwide instances in which voters were not able to find their names on the voters' lists. Eighteen (18) percent of voting centers across the country witnessed up to five individual cases. Seven (7) percent of voting centers reported six or more individual cases. In Tirana, Shkodër, and Durrës, voters did not find their names on voters' lists in 32%, 31%, 38% of voting centers, respectively. The scale of individual cases in the three municipalities implicated, mirrored that at the national level. Twenty-two (22) percent of centers in Tirana and Shkodër had up to five individual cases, with Durrës registering 26%. Thirteen (13) percent of Durrës voting centers experienced six or more individual cases, with Tirana and Shkodër 10% each.

Voter inking procedures were respected in 93% of cases nationwide, and the same trend was observed in Tirana, Durrës and Shkodër. Therefore, we cannot state that this procedure was fully respected; however, such a large percentage of procedural compliance indicates that non-observance of this procedure could not have affected overall election results.

CFFESD observers reported serious violations during the voting procedures in less than four (4%) of voting centers nationwide. A similar trend was observed in Tirana, Shkodër and Durrës. As this finding falls within the margin of error of $\pm 4\%$, it does not carry statistical significance and reflects isolated incidents observed in geographically dispersed locations. Incidents include suspension of voting of more than 30 min, taking photos of ballots, campaigning in or near to voting centers, voting more than once, and family voting⁴.

³ CFFESD monitors observed the following opening procedures: timely opening, inspection that ballot box is empty and sealed with security codes, whether the seals were recorded in seal log, whether copies of seal logs were distributed to all the commissioners and party observers, whether all VCs were equipped with necessary materials, and the VCC members presence.

⁴ Durrës VC 14202 and VC 14521, Elbasan VC 2245, Prrenjas VC 2791 Fier VC 3146, VC 3034, Gjirokaster 4120, Korce VC 3979, VC 3740, VC 4103, and VC 3868, Shkodër VC 89 and VC 243, Tirana VC 2115, VC 2082, VC 17281, VC 19201 and VC2061 and Vlore VC 4585 and VC4598.



Closing Procedures

Closing procedures in voting centers were conducted largely in an orderly manner throughout the country, without major irregularities that could compromise the conduct of the elections or its outcomes.

CFFESD observers reported serious violations—including the presence of unauthorized persons in voting centers, suspension of closing procedure for more than 30 minutes, and such procedural violations as not securing and sealing of ballot box prior to transport—in less than 1% of voting centers nationwide. This is not a statistically significant finding, and cases cannot be interpreted as a national trend, but rather as isolated incidents. The same trend was observed in the Tirana, Durrës and Shkodër municipalities.

The one significant closing procedure violation was allowing citizens who arrived at voting centers after 7pm to vote in eight percent (8%) of voting centers nationwide.

Political party pollwatchers submitted official complaints in 7% of voting centers nationwide. The Socialist Party and Democratic Party filed complaints in 5% of voting centers. The Socialist Party for Integration filed complaints in 3% of voting centers. The Tirana and Durrës municipalities echoed this trend with complaints registered in 3% and 5% of voting centers, respectively. In Shkodër, written complaints were filed in 17% of voting centers.

Women and Voters with Disabilities

In 37% of voting centers nationwide, there were no female members of the polling station commission. In Durrës and Shkodër, in 20% and 40% of voting centers respectively, there were no female members in VCCs.

A woman was the chair of the commission in 15% of voting centers nationwide. While Durrës and Shkodra follow the national trend, the situation in Tirana is almost two times better than the national average, at 29% of voting centers being chaired by women. The Coalition regrets the fact that the third-tier level of election administration continues to suffer from extremely low representation of women.

The Coalition pointed out serious and widespread shortcomings related to ensuring the voters with disabilities the right to participate in the election. More than 57% of voting centers nationwide were not physically accessible to voters with disabilities. A similar pattern was observed in the municipalities of Tirana, Shkodër and Durrës. The Coalition notes that, in 51 % of voting centers nationwide, visually impaired voters could not exercise their right to vote independently and in secrecy.

Nationwide, CFFESD observers noted that voters with disabilities were not able to vote independently and in secret. A similar pattern was observed in the municipalities of Tirana, Shkodër, and Durrës.

Observer Access to Voting Centers

CFFESD is pleased to note that the right of nonpartisan observers to be present in voting centers and to monitor their proceedings was respected in nearly all voting centers throughout



the country. In 99% of voting centers, observers exercised their rights as stipulated in the election code. There were isolated incidents in which this right was not respected, mostly during the closing procedure. Observations in the Tirana, Durrës, and Shkodër municipalities echoed the nationwide trend.

Pollwatchers of the Socialist Party and Democratic Party were present in approximately 90% of voting centers. The Socialist Party for Integration had pollwatchers in approximately 80% of voting centers. A similar pattern was observed in the municipalities of Tirana and Shkodër, while in Durrës all three parties were represented in approximately 95% voting centers.

About the Coalition

The Coalition for Free and Fair Elections and Sustainable Democracy (CFFESD) is an independent, non-partisan organization to promote civic participation in elections and in securing sustainable democracy. CFFESD focuses on issues that influence the upholding of human rights, gender equality and the rights of people with disabilities.

CFFESD has endorsed the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations and its code of conduct of GDNEM (Global Network of Domestic Elections Monitor, setting forth a clear and forceful statement of principles and code of conduct for nonpartisan election monitoring by citizen organizations. CFFE observation methodology is in full compliance with international standards including international documents, such as the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the European Human Rights Convention, the Constitution of the Republic of Albania as well as the Albanian Electoral Code.

CFFESD as of June 6, 2015 consists of 30 partner organizations and hundreds of Albanian citizens who volunteer their time to CFFESD's efforts for the Local Elections of June 21, 2015.

This project on local election observation is supported by Assist Impact through funding provided by USAID and with the technical assistance from the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

More details and findings can be found at:

Website: www.kzln.org.al

Facebook: [Koalicioni për Zgjedhje të Lira e të Ndershme](#)

Twitter: [KZLN_CFFE_Albania](#)

For more information, please contact:

Mirela Arqimandriti, Election Observation Team Leader

Erjona Mulellari, Executive Director, CFFESD

Dhimitër Gjodede, Long Term Observers Coordinator

Email: kzln@kzln.org.al Cell: 068 20 59 301

