

**INTERIM REPORT**  
**1 April – 21 April 2025**

**28 April 2025**

**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The 2025 parliamentary elections take place against the backdrop of changes to the electoral system and the introduction of out-of-country voting for the first time, marking the elections as an important milestone for the country. These elections are also considered a further important test of the development of Albania's democratic processes and institutions, particularly in the context of on-going accession talks with the European Union. The political environment is characterized by a high degree of polarization and mistrust between the two main parties.
- Changes to the legal framework in 2024 and 2025 amended the electoral system and introduced out-of-country voting, but no comprehensive review of the framework has been undertaken. Under the new electoral system, each electoral subject presents both closed and preferential lists. Seats won by a party or coalition in an electoral district are first assigned to candidates from the closed lists. Whilst ODIHR recommendations amending the nationwide threshold for independent candidates and removing the possibility for political party leaders to compete in several electoral districts have been addressed, many previous ODIHR recommendations remain unimplemented.
- The Central Election Commission (CEC) is responsible for overseeing administration of elections. Preparations for the elections are on track, including for out-of-country voting, and thus far the election administration has largely complied with the legal deadlines. Out-of-country voting will take place using postal ballots and the CEC conducted an extensive information campaign on registration for voters abroad. The CEC has also launched targeted voter education campaigns addressing the general population, national minorities, and persons with disabilities. Electronic voting and counting will be piloted in select municipalities with testing and public demonstrations planned ahead of election day.
- Approximately 3.7 million voters are registered for these elections, including some 246 thousand for out-of-country voting. In order to allow inclusive registration of overseas voters, the CEC decided to extend validity of expired IDs. Voters could verify their data and request corrections, including online, during the public scrutiny period. Voter identification on election day is conducted using e-identification devices.
- Elections can be contested by candidates nominated by political parties, coalitions of parties, or independent candidates nominated by groups of voters. The CEC registered eleven electoral subjects - eight political parties and three coalitions, with a total of 2,046 candidates. The Electoral Code includes a gender quota, requiring that one in every three candidates on both lists must belong to the less represented gender.
- Women are equally represented in ministerial positions, holding half of the posts in the current government. However, women remain under-represented in parliament, holding 50 of the 140 seats (36 per cent). Three out of 12 CEC members and some 31 per cent of Commissions of Electoral Administration Zone members are women. Of the registered candidates, 787 (38.47 per cent) are women. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors highlighted persistent gender stereotyping

and discriminatory rhetoric against politically active women as significant barriers to participation.

- The official campaign period commenced on 11 April. After some high-profile events to mark the launch of the campaign it has been low-key. Personal attacks between leaders of the main parties are common, including online. The misuse of state resources and campaigning within public institutions is prohibited, but concerns persist about pressure on civil servants, undue influence on voters and the misuse of public assets. The CEC has received numerous complaints related to campaign violations and continues to actively monitor compliance, including the online activities of 50 public institutions. While campaigning on social networks lacks formal regulation, political parties have voluntarily committed to a Code of Conduct promoting ethical digital campaigning. New personal data protection laws and guidelines have been introduced to safeguard voter information, with authorities calling for vigilance against the misuse of personal data during the campaign.
- The campaign may be financed from public and private funds, including loans. The law sets limits for donations and expenditures. The CEC oversees compliance with campaign finance regulations. No substantial amendments to the regulatory framework have been introduced since the last elections. ODIHR recommendations on interim reporting, regulation of third-party financing, and extending public funding to independent candidates remain unaddressed.
- The legal framework protects freedom of expression, though defamation remains criminalised, and civil and criminal defamation cases against journalists persist. The independence of media and diversity in reporting is impacted by a concentration in media ownership and a dependence of owners on public tenders for their broader business interests. Concerns exist regarding the independence of management boards of the broadcast regulator and public service broadcaster. The Electoral Code provides parties that won over 20 per cent of seats in the previous elections twice as much news coverage than other contesting parliamentary parties.
- The Complaints and Sanctioning Commission (CSC) serves as the first-instance body for appeals against decisions of the CEC and lower-level commissions, which can be appealed in the final instance to the Electoral College of the Tirana Court of Appeal. Electoral subjects have three days to lodge an appeal, except relating to election results for which the deadline is five days. Third parties with a legitimate interest can lodge an administrative appeal. The Special Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime established a task force for investigating certain electoral crimes and an online platform for public reporting.
- The Constitution provides for full political, civil and social rights for minorities. Campaigning in national minority languages is permitted. The CEC states it will produce some election materials in the languages of the national minorities and has launched a series of voter information activities to promote the participation of underrepresented groups.
- The Electoral Code provides for citizen and international observation at all levels. As of 11 April, 26 national and 10 international organizations had been accredited. CSOs have informed the ODIHR EOM that a lack of funding will impact their capacity to undertake a comprehensive observation on election day. Representatives of parties, coalitions and independent candidates may also observe.

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

Following an invitation from the authorities, ODIHR established an Election Observation Mission (EOM) in Tirana on 1 April. The ODIHR EOM, headed by Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, consists of a 12-member core team based in Tirana and 26 long-term observers deployed on 10 April across the

country. Current mission members are drawn from 22 OSCE participating States and 50 per cent are women. ODIHR has requested participating States to second 300 short-term observers.

### III. BACKGROUND

In the lead-up to the 11 May parliamentary elections, called by President Bajram Begaj on 5 December 2024, the political climate is characterised by deep polarization, internal party divisions, on-going high-profile corruption cases, and growing concerns over democratic governance and freedom of expression.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, progress on EU candidacy negotiations and the first-ever implementation of out-of-country voting have been the key topics in public discourse.

The political landscape remains dominated by the two main parties: Prime Minister Edi Rama's Socialist Party (SP), which has won three consecutive parliamentary elections since 2013, and the opposition Democratic Party (DP), currently led by former Prime Minister Sali Berisha.<sup>2</sup> However, DP has experienced significant internal conflicts resulting in the creation of a new splinter party, the Euro-Atlantic Democrats.

In October 2024, former President Ilir Meta, leader of the Freedom Party (FP) was arrested on allegations of corruption. The following month, DP leader Sali Berisha was released from house arrest after anti-corruption charges against him were revoked. A series of anti-government protests, which began in late 2024 and continued into 2025, criticized the erosion of democratic institutions and accused the government of corruption and the misuse of state resources. The protests also emerged as a response to the arrests, which some opposition groups perceived as politically motivated. In February, Erion Veliaj, the mayor of Tirana and a prominent member of SP was also arrested on allegations of corruption.<sup>3</sup>

On 17 February, the Parliament voted to dismiss all 11 members of the steering council of the public Albanian Radio-Television following alleged irregularities in selecting a new Director General. A new council was appointed on 17 March. On 6 March the Council of Ministers temporarily banned access to TikTok. Three civil society organizations challenged this decision to the Constitutional Court on 25 March for its potential infringement on freedom of expression.<sup>4</sup>

Women are well represented in ministerial positions, holding half of the posts in the current government but remain under-represented in parliament, holding 50 out of 140 (36 per cent) seats. Several interlocutors pointed to persistent gender stereotypes and discriminatory rhetoric against women active in politics as a barrier to women entering political life. They also noted weak internal party democracy as a key concern for women's representation and advancement within some parties.

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<sup>1</sup> The legislative power is vested in a 140-member unicameral parliament, elected for four-year terms. Executive power rests with the government, led by the prime minister. The president is the head of state.

<sup>2</sup> In the previous parliamentary elections held in 2021, the SP secured 74 seats; the alliance led by the *Democratic Party "Alliance for Change"* (DP) gained 59 seats; the *Socialist Movement for Integration* (SMI) 4; and the *Social Democratic Party* (SDP) 3 seats. In the 2023 local elections, the SP won 52 mayoral contests, the *Together we Win Coalition*, 7, and the *Greek Ethnic Minority for the Future Party*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Following this arrest, Prime Minister Edi Rama made critical remarks on the Special Structure for Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK). On 12 February, the High Judicial Council published a statement maintaining that remarks by persons in position of executive or political power against SPAK threaten judicial independence.

<sup>4</sup> The Association of Albanian Journalists, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network in Albania, and the Centre for Legal Empowerment also requested for the ban to be lifted until a decision by Constitutional Court is made.

#### IV. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Parliamentary elections are primarily regulated by the 1998 Constitution and the 2008 Electoral Code, complemented by a set of regulations issued by the CEC.<sup>5</sup> Albania is party to major international legal instruments related to democratic elections.<sup>6</sup>

The Electoral Code was amended in July 2024 and February 2025, introducing changes to the electoral system and certain campaign finance rules and providing for out-of-country voting, as requested by a Constitutional Court ruling. Additionally, legal provisions declared unconstitutional in 2021 were subsequently repealed.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, a comprehensive revision of the electoral legal framework, following an inclusive consultation process, was not undertaken. Although certain ODIHR recommendations, such as revision of the nationwide threshold for independent candidates and the removal of the possibility for political party leaders to compete in several electoral districts, were addressed, many previous ODIHR recommendations remain unimplemented. These include, *inter alia*, recommendations related to the composition of lower-level election commissions, suffrage rights of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, removal of criminal liability for defamation, independent media coverage during electoral campaigns, interim reporting on campaign finance and the extension of campaign finance regulations to third parties.

Following an agreement between the two largest parties, the 2024 amendments added a closed list component alongside the existing preferential voting lists.<sup>8</sup> Several smaller parties, including some representing minorities, challenged the new system in the Constitutional Court, arguing that it benefits the two dominant parties, undermines the real possibility of a candidate from the open list to win a seat and does not respect the constitutionally imposed preferential voting requirements.<sup>9</sup> The Court rejected the complaint, stating that the system was in compliance with the Constitution.<sup>10</sup>

The parliament is elected through a proportional system from 12 multi-member electoral districts corresponding to administrative regions. The number of seats per district is based on its population. Under the new electoral system, each party or coalition presents a closed list, with a number of candidates equal to one-third of the number of seats in the district, and a preferential list, with the same number of candidates as there are seats in the district. Seats won in a district are first assigned to closed list candidates, with remaining seats distributed to candidates from the preferential lists, based on the number of preferential votes they receive. A party or coalition must pass a one per cent nationwide threshold to qualify for seat allocation. A gender quota of one-third must be respected both on the two lists and in the

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<sup>5</sup> Secondary legislation includes the 2000 Law on Political Parties, 2001 Law on Demonstrations, 2013 Law on Audio-Visual Media, 2015 Law on Guaranteeing the Integrity of Persons Elected, Appointed, or Exercising Public Functions (Law on Decriminalization), 2008 Law on Gender Equality, 2024 Law on Personal Data Protection.

<sup>6</sup> In 2023 Albania signed the Second Additional Protocol to the Cybercrime Convention on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence. Albania is a member of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

<sup>7</sup> The Constitutional Court ruled that the criteria for allocating parliamentary mandates were unconstitutional, specifically the threshold required for reordering preferential list candidates and the one per cent national threshold imposed on independent candidates. A Constitutional Court decision from December 2022 requested the Parliament to amend within a year the legal framework in order to implement the constitutional right of the Albanian citizens residing abroad to vote in elections.

<sup>8</sup> The Law amending the Electoral Code passed with 106 votes in favour and two against, without public consultation.

<sup>9</sup> One of the smaller coalitions has indicated that candidates on its closed list, if elected, will resign to make way for candidates from their preferential list.

<sup>10</sup> Article 64.3 of the Constitution, states that "The law on elections guarantees that no less than two-thirds of the multi-name list should be subject to preferential voting and ensures gender representation."

final distribution of mandates. An independent candidate wins a seat if the total number of valid votes received is equal to one electoral quotient.<sup>11</sup>

## V. THE ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The elections are administered by the CEC, 93 Commissions of Electoral Administration Zones (CEAZs) and 5,225 Voting Centre Commissions (VCCs). Counting is conducted regionally by Counting Teams (CTs) in 93 Ballot Counting Centres (BCCs), with one BCC for each Electoral Administration Zone (EAZ).

The CEC consists of three branches: The State Election Commissioner (the Commissioner) and the Deputy Commissioner, the Regulatory Commission (the Regulator), and the Complaints and Sanctions Commission (CSC).<sup>12</sup> All CEC members are elected by the parliament by no less than three-fifth of the votes.<sup>13</sup> Currently, three out of 12 CEC members are women. The CEC publishes its decisions and data online and provides live broadcasts of its sessions. It shares draft regulations with parties and civil society before formal adoption and solicits their views and commentaries for consideration.

CEAZs are responsible for organizing the elections in their respective areas, appointing the members of the VCCs and CTs, and for tabulating results.<sup>14</sup> Each CEAZ is composed of seven members and a non-voting secretary, nominated by the parliamentary majority and opposition.<sup>15</sup> Political parties may recall or replace their commission members at their own discretion and without justification.<sup>16</sup> As of 12 April, approximately 31 per cent of CEAZ members are women, which meets the legal requirement. To enhance coordination to address potential violations around VCs, CEAZs will appoint two members of each VCC as security coordinators.<sup>17</sup>

Electoral preparations are underway, and so far, the election administration has largely complied with its legal deadlines. Following the 2024 amendments, for the first time, Albanians living abroad can vote in

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<sup>11</sup> Mandates are allocated by ranking quotients derived from dividing each electoral subject's votes by successive divisors (1, 2, 3, etc.) up to the total number of seats in the district. Contestants win as many seats as the number of their quotients that rank within the available seats. For independent candidates, votes are divided only by one.

<sup>12</sup> The Commissioner has broad executive authority and represents the CEC externally. The Deputy Commissioner oversees voter identification technology, recruitment and training of election officials. The Regulator adopts sub-legal acts while the CSC examines complaints against decisions of the Commissioner and CEAZs, rules on the invalidity of voting and election results, and may impose sanctions at the Commissioner's request.

<sup>13</sup> Article 13.2 of the Electoral Code states the right to run or be proposed for Commissioner shall be enjoyed by Albanian citizens from the ranks of former political or cabinet officials, former senior management officers, or former leaders of not-for-profit organisations operating in the area of elections and human rights. The length of their mandates differs: the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner are elected for seven and four-year terms, respectively, while the Regulator and the CSC for a five and a nine-year term, respectively.

<sup>14</sup> Special VCs will be established if a CEAZ has a penal institution or a hospital in its zone. The CEC has identified 18 special VCs, with 16 located in correctional facilities, and two in care homes for the elderly.

<sup>15</sup> CEAZs were constituted in February 2025 and received initial training by 8 March. Three members were nominated by the parliamentary majority and three by the parliamentary opposition (two by the main ruling/opposition party and one by the second party of the parliamentary majority/opposition). The seventh member is proposed by the main ruling party in one half of CEAZs, and by the main opposition party in the other half. In the 93 CEAZs, a total of 741 members were appointed: 279 from the DP, 279 from the SP, 93 from the SDP, and 90 from the FP.

<sup>16</sup> As of April 19, 156 CEAZ member have been replaced. Section II.3.1.f of the Venice Commission's 2002 [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#), states that "the bodies appointing members of electoral commissions must not be free to dismiss them at will".

<sup>17</sup> One member will be from the largest party in parliament and another from the second largest party

the parliamentary elections. The CEC has the responsibility for registering out of country voters and organizing the process.<sup>18</sup>

Out-of-country voting will be conducted through postal voting and DHL was chosen by the CEC as the service provider. Out-of-country voters will receive ballots for the constituency of their last registered address in Albania. The distribution of ballots is on-going and as of 19 April over 170,000 of the 245,000 ballots for out-of-country voters had been dispatched. In order for ballots to be counted, they must arrive back in Albania by May 11 at 7:00 p.m. The CEC's out-of-country voting centre in Tirana is responsible for processing postal ballots and has already started to receive mailed ballots from overseas voters. While broadly considered as a landmark reform, the scale of this initiative has raised concerns among the CEC and various stakeholders regarding logistical challenges and potential vulnerabilities in its administration.

The CEC has launched a comprehensive voter education strategy with three focus areas: a general campaign targeting all voters, campaign dedicated to national minorities, and one for persons with disabilities.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the CEC conducts a campaign to inform voters abroad. The voter education content is disseminated through TV, radio and on the institution's social media channels.<sup>20</sup> The CEC is using accessible formats such as sign language interpretation for TV spots and providing information in braille.

According to the Electoral Code, voters can only vote in-person at the VC; voting by mobile ballot box is not provided for. Voters with disabilities may request assistance from a family member or another voter in the polling station. To assist voter with disabilities, the CEC will provide tactile ballot templates for visually impaired voters and accessible voting booths in all VCs.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the CEC continues to train CEAZ staff on assisting voters with disabilities.

For these elections, electronic voting and ballot counting machines will be used in one administrative unit in each of the municipalities of Tirana and Vorë.<sup>22</sup> Offline touchscreen devices record the vote and generate paper receipts for voters. The Electoral Code does not explicitly require independent audits or certifications of electronic systems. The CEC co-operates closely with the National Cyber Security Authority on the implementation and monitoring of election technology. The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that security tests for electronic identification devices and electronic voting machines have been completed, with functional testing scheduled two weeks before elections. Public demonstrations of the voting machines are planned for 10 to 14 days prior to election day.

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<sup>18</sup> A total of five regulations were adopted by the Regulator regarding the out-of-country, of which three were adopted in time and two with a four-month delay in March 2025. According to the CEC, this was due to its efforts to align the regulations with the regulatory framework and to ensure compliance with the in-country electoral timeline.

<sup>19</sup> To support voter outreach for minority communities the CEC has translated some electoral information into eight out of nine minority languages and subtitled video spots. The CEC stated that materials were not translated into Egyptian due to that community's familiarity with the Albanian language.

<sup>20</sup> The CEC's information campaign aims to raise awareness about voter registration, preventing electoral crimes such as vote buying, clarifying prohibited activities and the misuse of public resources, election day procedures, and use of e-voting machines. The campaign also addresses voting by youth and women, as well as the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and national minorities.

<sup>21</sup> The CEC has instructed CEAZs to ensure ramps, proper signage, and barrier-free access wherever feasible. The CEC will provide signage for people with disabilities in each polling place.

<sup>22</sup> Electronic voting and ballot counting will be used in a total of 75 VCCs (31 in Tirana and 44 in Vorë) in 2025. In 2021, the devices were first piloted in an Electoral Administration Zone (EAZ) of Tirana (32 VCCs) while in the 2023 local elections, the electronic voting devices were piloted in 401 VCs across the municipalities of Elbasan, Kamëz, and Vorë. The Electoral Code (Article 22 (1)) specifies that ICT is to be introduced through pilot projects, in no less than 10 percent of the number of voters for each phase of implementation.

## VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Albanian citizens aged 18 years or older on election day are eligible to vote. Citizens found incompetent by a court decision cannot vote, at odds with international obligations prohibiting discrimination based on disability.<sup>23</sup> Citizens serving a prison sentence for committing certain crimes may not vote.<sup>24</sup>

Voter registration for the in-country process is passive. Voters over 100 years of age are automatically removed from voter lists and must confirm their records for re-inclusion. The voter lists are extracted from the National Civil Status Register and maintained by the General Directorate of Civil Status (GDSCS) within the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Voters can check their records physically at municipal buildings, schools as well as online until election day. After that, any requests for change or inclusion in the voter lists can only be made through a district court up to 24 hours before election day. The CEC published final voters lists on 1 April with 3,713,761 registered voters, including those residing abroad.

All eligible voters with residence abroad can register for out-of-country voting. Following an extensive online and television voter information campaign targeting the diaspora, the CEC conducted voter registration from 11 January to 4 March. To register, voters were requested to upload their Albanian biometric IDs issued after 2009 and proof of their overseas residency status.<sup>25</sup> Initially, the CEC required valid IDs but changed their decision to allow for those with expired documents to register.<sup>26</sup> The final out-of-country voter list was published on 11 March with 245,935 voters from 85 countries.<sup>27</sup> The CEC has appointed two auditors to assess the accuracy of both the in-country and out-of-country voter lists.

As for previous elections, voter identification will be used in all VCCs across Albania, conducted by e-identification offline devices containing the voter lists of all voting centres. Voters are verified using biometric ID cards or passports, with fingerprint scans replacing signatures on paper.

## VII. REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES AND CANDIDATE LISTS

Any eligible voter has the right to stand for elections, except those serving a prison sentence based on a final court decision for certain crimes. This right may also be restricted for citizens convicted under a non-final court decision in certain jurisdictions, as well as for individuals subject to an international arrest warrant or those deported from specific states.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the Constitution outlines categories of officials whose positions are deemed incompatible with the right to stand for election.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Article 29 of the 2006 [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD) requires States Parties to “guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others”. See also Paragraph 48 of [General Comment No. 1 to Article 12 of the CRPD](#).

<sup>24</sup> In line with Article 45 of the Constitution, the Law on Decriminalization denies voting rights for those serving a prison sentence for committing crimes listed in more than 80 articles of the Criminal Code (ranging from election related offences to severe crimes).

<sup>25</sup> Albanian passport and residency card.

<sup>26</sup> The CEC received a large number of requests from overseas voters regarding expired Albanian biometric IDs. As a result, the Council of Ministers by the nominative act No 1 and 2, 5.2.2025 changed the registration criteria. Some 41,000 applicants were rejected, *inter alia*, because they could not prove their address in their country of residence.

<sup>27</sup> The largest groups of out-of-country registered voters is in Italy, with 91,223 (37.1 per cent), and Greece, 68,386 (27.8 per cent). Among the others, there are large number of voters in Germany 25,499 (10.4 per cent), the United States 20,653 (8.4 per cent) and the United Kingdom 17,227 (7 per cent).

<sup>28</sup> The Law on Decriminalization refers to deportation from an EU Member State, Australia, Canada and the United States. It also references citizens convicted for certain crimes or deported, even in the absence of a final court decision from an EU Member State, Australia, Canada, and the United States are barred to stand for election, as those under an international search warrant.

<sup>29</sup> President of the Republic, judges, prosecutors, military, police, national security officers, diplomats, mayors, prefects, chairs and election commission members, and high state administration officials determined by law.

Candidates can be nominated by parties and coalitions registered with the CEC as electoral subjects or stand independently. The CEC registered 11 electoral subjects (eight political parties and three coalitions) by the 12 March deadline. Parties and coalitions were required to submit two types of candidates lists: a closed list with a predetermined numerical order, and a separate list for preferential voting. A candidate may only appear in one list. Independent candidates can stand through nomination by groups of voters, but no independent candidates are registered for these elections.<sup>30</sup>

Candidates are verified by the CEC in line with the Electoral Code and the Law on Decriminalization.<sup>31</sup> Electoral subjects may remove and replace candidates before the CEC finalizes the candidate lists. The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that during the registration 16 candidates were disqualified based on information provided in their self-declaration forms. Affected parties resubmitted new candidates to the CEC.<sup>32</sup> By the legal deadline of 25 March, the CEC registered 2,046 candidates, of which 787 (38.47 per cent) are women. The Electoral Code requires that one in every three candidates on both lists must belong to the less represented gender.

## VIII. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

The official campaign period commenced on 11 April and lasts for 29 days, followed by a period of campaign silence for 24 hours prior to and on election day. While not prohibited, several ODIHR EOM interlocutors noted campaigning in the months leading up to the elections, including abroad. In marking the official start of the campaign, a number of parties organized events across the country.

The campaign has remained low-key to date, with limited visibility, apart from campaign materials posted in designated public spaces. Both SP and DP have organized a number of large events across the country to launch their campaigns, along with some events by smaller parties.<sup>33</sup> Personal attacks between leaders of the main parties are common, including online, as are mutual accusations of corruption and links to organized crime. Smaller parties maintained that they would focus on door-to-door outreach and social networks, still, they were less active on these platforms than SP or DP.

The main topics at rallies and on social networks included EU membership, the economy, and the fight against corruption, with DP accusing the incumbent of misusing state resources, vote-buying, and other electoral crimes. SP organized a number of campaign events focusing on women voters and largely featuring women candidates. Both SP and DP have promised an increase in minimum wage, pensions, and expanded social services, while smaller parties, such as the Opportunity Party, Albania Becomes

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<sup>30</sup> A group of at least nine voters must register with the CEC to collect signatures from one per cent of voters in their district, but no more than 3,000. A candidate proposed by such a group may not be affiliated with or support any political party or coalition participating in the elections. Incumbent Members of Parliament may run as independent candidates but are not required to be nominated by a group of voters.

<sup>31</sup> Each candidate must submit a self-declaration form among other documents supporting their candidacy. The CEC verification process is conducted in co-operation with General Directorate of Prisons (Criminal Records Office) and Civil Registry Office. Procedures are regulated by the Law on Decriminalization, an Assembly by-law, as well as the Commissioner's guidelines.

<sup>32</sup> Sixteen candidates had committed criminal offenses that constituted a legal impediment to candidacy under Law no. 138/2015, following the submission of information provided by the General Directorate of Prisons. Five of the candidates were from the New Democracy Alliance, one from the Social Democratic Party, two from the Homeland Movement, one from the Opportunity Party, four from the Albanian National Alliance, two from Right for Development and one from the Democratic Party.

<sup>33</sup> The ODIHR EOM has observed 28 campaign events, of which 18 featured women speakers. 19 of these events were accessible to persons with disabilities, but none included sign-language interpretation.



Movement, the Together Movement, and the Euro-Atlantic Coalition, focused on anti-corruption measures, improved social services, inequality, and economic reform.

The legal framework prohibits the use of state resources in support of candidates, political parties, and coalitions and bans campaigning in public institutions. In the four months leading up to election day no legislation can be proposed or approved that grants benefits.<sup>34</sup> During this period, public institutions and state entities must report to the CEC any activities involving citizen and media participation, which the CEC may declare as potential misuse of state resources. Civil servants may not participate in political activities during office hours and are prohibited from publicly expressing their political preferences. Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns regarding the misuse of state resources (including for the out of country vote), pressure on public sector employees, and the impact of so-called “patronage networks” on voting.<sup>35</sup>

The CEC also informed the ODIHR EOM that as of 11 April, they had received 94 complaints regarding election-related violations, 6 of which were regarding the use of public assets, from stakeholders and whistle-blowers, involving 219 subjects. The CEC initiated administrative investigations for 70 of these complaints, of which 42 have been concluded and in 3 cases, the CEC proposed to the CSC to impose fines.

The CEC appointed 96 individuals to monitor compliance with campaign regulations across the 12 electoral districts. Monitors submit weekly reports on activities of political contestants across the country to be referenced for the checking of contestants’ financial declarations, and also report on campaign violations. According to the CEC, between 11 January and 15 April, monitors submitted 1,160 reports. These reports identified 23 violations: 12 related to electoral offices operating within 300 meters of voting centres, and 11 concerned campaign materials lacking proper labelling.

Campaigning on social networks is not expressly regulated and there is no regulatory authority designated by law to monitor campaign activities on social networks.<sup>36</sup> None of the ODIHR EOM interlocutors have raised significant concern about foreign interference in the electoral process as they see it as a relatively low risk concern. The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that it had set up a special unit to monitor the social network accounts of 50 public institutions during the campaign.<sup>37</sup> For the first time, several political parties signed a voluntary Code of Conduct on Digital Campaigns, committing to uphold ethical standards during the campaign, refrain from hate speech, combat misinformation and disinformation, and maintain transparency in political advertising.<sup>38</sup> Some CSOs noted that they will conduct limited monitoring regarding discriminatory and hate speech in the online campaign.

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<sup>34</sup> A 9 January [Decision](#) of the Council of Ministers provided for all pensioners in Albania to receive a spring bonus along with their monthly pension. Distribution of the payments of ALL 10,000 (approximately EUR 100) or ALL 5,000 (EUR 50), depending on the level of pension, started on 1 March. Many ODIHR EOM interlocutors criticized this as an effort to influence the vote.

<sup>35</sup> ODIHR LTOs received reports of misuse of administrative resources. Allegations of pressure on municipal employees by their superiors to undertake work for the SP campaign were made in Gjirokastrë, Lezhë, Pukë, Shkodër, and Tropojë. In 4 of the 13 opening campaign events observed by the ODIHR EOM (Vlorë, Fier, Peshkopi and Has) public administration employees stated that they were advised by supervisors to attend the rally.

<sup>36</sup> Since 6 April, the ODIHR EOM has been following the campaign activities of 23 contestants on Facebook and Instagram.

<sup>37</sup> Based on this CEC monitoring, for the period from 11 April to 20 April, three posts were found to be in violation of CEC regulations and were referred for administrative investigation, according to the CEC.

<sup>38</sup> The [Code](#) was developed by International IDEA, the Rule of Law Centre at the University of Helsinki, and the National Democratic Institute, in cooperation with the CEC, after consultations with parties and stakeholders.

A number of ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns regarding the misuse of personal data. A Law on Personal Data Protection was passed in 2024 and the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data published guidelines on the processing of personal data in electoral campaigns. The Commissioner also issued a statement together with the CEC appealing to political parties on obligations for personal data protection and calling on voters and electoral subjects to report data breaches or related violations.<sup>39</sup>

## IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance is primarily regulated by the Electoral Code in conjunction with the Law on Political Parties. With the exception of the introduction of self-funding cap, the provision excluding candidate expenditures from the total campaign ceiling of the electoral entity, and certain rules for financial reporting included in a Regulatory Commission regulation, no substantial amendments to the legal framework relating to campaign finance have been introduced since 2020. In particular ODIHR key recommendations on interim finance reporting, regulation of third-party financing, and extending public funding to independent candidates remain unaddressed.

Contestants may finance their campaigns from public and private funds. Political parties with parliamentary representation receive funds annually from the state budget. Parties that secured at least one per cent of votes in the previous parliamentary elections are also eligible for public funding for the electoral campaign, allocated proportionally based on their share of the vote. Independent candidates are not entitled to public funding. On 21 March, the CEC distributed ALL 131,301,816 (approx. EUR 1,313,000) to eleven contestants.

Contestants may also finance campaigns from their own funds, donations from Albanian citizens and legal entities, and bank loans. Following the 2025 amendments to the Electoral Code, the ceiling on the use of a contestant's own funds was raised from ALL 1 million to ALL 3 million (approx. EUR 30,000). Donations, including in-kind contributions, are capped at ALL 1 million (approx. EUR 10,000), without a limit on the aggregate amount of donations that a party or candidate may accept. Each contestant must register donations and identify donors in a register approved by the CEC. Contributions above ALL 50,000 (approximately EUR 500) must be made through a designated bank account. There is no cap on loans nor specific regulations related to them.

For these elections, campaign spending limits were increased from a maximum of three times to a maximum of five times the highest amount received by an electoral subject from public funds. The spending ceiling for parties and coalitions, excluding the candidates on their lists, is ALL 326,456,950 (approx. EUR 3,300,000) while for independent candidates - ALL 32,645,695 (approx. EUR 330,000). Campaign expenditures for online activities have to be reported and are included in the overall campaign spending limit. The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that they monitor the paid political advertisements of 77 contestants' accounts on Facebook.

The CEC oversees compliance with campaign finance regulations and applies sanctions for non-compliance. Contestants are required to submit financial reports within 60 days from the official announcement of the results. All campaign finance reports must be submitted through an electronic Financial Reporting Platform of the CEC website. No interim reporting is required. Within five days from the announcement, the CEC must appoint auditors to review these reports. The auditors' findings

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<sup>39</sup> See the [Joint Statement](#) by the Commissioner for Right to Information and Personal Data Protection and the State Election Commissioner published on 3 February.

must be published within 30 days of their submission. The Electoral Code includes a list of sanctions for financial violations during the campaign.

## X. THE MEDIA

A lack of financial viability for many media, caused by decreasing advertising revenues and undeveloped alternative business models, impacts the independence and diversity of media and reporting. The dependence on non-transparent financing by business interests, often reliant on public tenders, impacts the oversight role of media vis-a-vis political power. In addition, a concentration in media ownership further undermines the plurality of news sources.<sup>40</sup>

According to ODIHR EOM interlocutors, journalists face interference in editorial independence and practice self-censorship. Furthermore, media advocacy groups report a number of verbal and physical assaults against journalists.<sup>41</sup> Several civil society-founded and donor-funded media outlets provide investigative and public interest journalism but are affected by recent cuts in international funding.

Overall, the Constitution and legislation provide protection of freedom of expression. However, despite previous ODIHR recommendations, defamation remains a criminal offence and there have been a significant number of criminal and civil defamation cases, including strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPP) cases, against journalists.<sup>42</sup> The bi-partisan appointment procedure of both the Audio-visual Media Authority (AMA) Board as well as the Public Broadcaster's Albanian Radio-Television (RTSH) Steering Board has been criticized by many ODIHR EOM interlocutors as not adequately providing for independence.<sup>43</sup>

The Electoral Code provides parties winning over 20 per cent of seats in the previous parliamentary elections with twice as much coverage in news than other parliamentary parties. Coverage of non-parliamentary parties is at the discretion of the broadcasters but may not exceed the coverage provided to parliamentary parties with less than 20 per cent of seats. Political parties are entitled to free airtime for political advertising and the right to purchase advertising time under certain conditions.<sup>44</sup> The AMA

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<sup>40</sup> According to the European University Institute [2024 Media Pluralism Monitor](#), the top four owners in the broadcast market control 72 per cent of revenues and 87 per cent of the audience share. The Law on Audiovisual Media limits ownership of national broadcast licenses to 20 per cent in a second national license, and limits the share of a national license holder to 30 per cent in the advertising market.

<sup>41</sup> The European Centre for Press & Media Freedom [reported](#) 45 incidents against media freedom in 2024. In February 2024, the High Court deemed lawful the seizure by the SPAK of phones and computers belonging to a journalist who was reporting on an organized crime case under SPAK investigation. Subsequently, international Media NGOs [expressed](#) concern over the potential disclosure of journalists' sources and the UN Human Rights Committee [ordered](#) an interim measure, stopping further processing of the seized material until a final decision. The High Court's decision was overturned by the Constitutional Court on 22 April 2025. The Court annulled the previous decisions allowing the seizure of computer data and granted the applicant's request to destroy all data on seized items. The Court deemed the seizure as a disproportionate interference in the applicant's freedom of expression as well as the public's right to information.

<sup>42</sup> A Safejournalists.net [study](#) reported a total of 8 criminal and 65 civil defamation cases in 2023.

<sup>43</sup> On 6 September 2024, the RTSH Director resigned following concerns [raised](#) about the positions he held with the SP in the past. On 17 February 2025, the Parliament [dismissed](#) the RTSH Steering Council for irregularities in the selection of a new RTSH Director. A new Steering Council was appointed on 17 March. The application procedure for a new Director [closed](#) on 15 April 2025.

<sup>44</sup> According to a CEC decision of 4 April 2025, the two political parties with more than 20 per cent of seats are entitled to a total of 90 minutes of free airtime on television and radio, while parliamentary parties with less than 20 per cent of seats to a total of 45 minutes free airtime. Non-parliamentary parties receive 20 minutes airtime free of charge. Contesting parties are permitted to purchase up to 90 minutes advertising time per broadcaster under equal prices, while candidates on the preferential lists may purchase up to 140 minutes airtime. Broadcasters are obliged to provide half of the airtime they sold, as additional free airtime for political advertising.

started a solely quantitative monitoring of 29 broadcasters on 11 April and reports daily to the CEC. The CEC may impose corrections of violations or administrative sanctions.

On 8 April, the ODIHR EOM started monitoring four TV stations and three online news media. The monitored media outlets are *RTSH*, *TV Klan*, *Top Channel* and *A2 CNN*, as well as *panorama.al*, *lapsi.al* and *reporter.al*.

## **XI. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

The legal framework for resolving election disputes includes administrative procedures followed by the opportunity for judicial appeal. Complaints must be lodged within three days of a decision, except for appeals related to election results, which have a five-day deadline, and those concerning ballot design which must be filed within 24 hours. Observers may only appeal denial of their accreditation, while voters can only challenge their exclusion from the voter list through the District Court. However, third parties demonstrating a legitimate interest, including civil society organizations, may also file administrative appeals.

The Complaints and Sanctions Commission examines all appeals against CEC and CEAZ decisions in the first instance, including those challenging election results or validity. It has two days to decide on appeals, except for those related to election results for which the deadline is 10 days. The CSC also imposes sanctions upon CEC request. All cases are reviewed in public session, with the participation of the parties involved at all stages of the procedure. As of 21 April, the CSC has reviewed 13 complaints against CEC decisions, related *inter alia* to ballot design and certain prohibited activities, and one against a CEAZ decision. It accepted the appeal in three cases, overturned two CEC decisions and three are still under consideration. The remainder were rejected.

The Electoral College of the Tirana Administrative Court of Appeal (Electoral College) serves as the highest authority for adjudicating election-related disputes.<sup>45</sup> Only electoral subjects may appeal CSC decisions to the Electoral College; appeals must be filed within five days and considered within 10 days. Other parties must follow standard administrative procedures and may appeal to the Tirana Administrative Court. Appeals concerning candidate registration or decisions issued by the Regulatory Commission of the CEC can be filed directly with the Electoral College.<sup>46</sup> As of 21 April, the Electoral College had adjudicated and dismissed three complaints regarding political party registration, ballot design, and the use of electronic voting and counting devices. The Electoral College sessions are public, and the decision should be motivated and published on the website of the Court of Appeal of Tirana.

The Electoral Code provides for a wide range of administrative offences, which the CEC can investigate *ex officio* or following denunciation reports filed through a dedicated online portal. The Criminal Code defines 15 election-related criminal offences, with most under the General Prosecutor's competence. SPAK has jurisdiction over cases of electoral corruption committed by certain categories of high-level public officials or cases linked to organized crime. For the first time, SPAK has established an investigative task force and launched an online platform for reporting electoral offenses. A coordination protocol between SPAK, the CEC and the General Prosecutor's Office facilitates information sharing on electoral crimes.

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<sup>45</sup> The Electoral College consists of eight judges from first instance and appeal courts, appointed by the High Judicial Council, for a four-year term. The current Electoral College was appointed in September 2024. The panel for each case consists of five judges selected by drawing lots.

<sup>46</sup> For appeals outside the period starting 48 hours after the calling of elections, the administrative procedure deadline of 30 days applies for submitting an appeal and for the CSC or the Electoral College to decide upon it.

## **XII. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES**

There are nine recognized national minorities in Albania.<sup>47</sup> According to the 2023 census some 2.5 per cent of the population identify as from a national minority. The Constitution provides for full political, civil and social rights for minorities, and the Electoral Code guarantees the right to vote and be elected to all Albanian citizens regardless of ethnic background, race, religion or language.<sup>48</sup> Some minority parties claim the electoral system unduly benefits the two larger parties and limits the chances for smaller parties to win a seat.

The Law on the Protection of National Minorities confirms the right of persons belonging to national minorities to establish and take part in political parties, associations, and other civil organizations. One national minority party (Greek minority), is represented in the current parliament, with a single MP.<sup>49</sup> For the 2025 elections two national minority parties are contesting, both as part of the DP-led coalition.<sup>50</sup> Campaigning in national minority languages is permitted. The CEC is producing some election materials in the languages of national minorities. Many of the issues raised by minority representatives met by the ODIHR EOM are related to problems affecting the population as a whole, such as property rights, though the Roma and Egyptian communities also cite socio-economic discrimination.

## **XIII. ELECTION OBSERVATION**

The Electoral Code provides for citizen and international observation at all levels. As of 11 April, 26 national and 10 international organizations had been accredited. Citizen observer organizations will deploy some long as well as short-term observers throughout the country to follow the electoral process, and will focus on the misuse of public resources, the performance of election administration and campaign finance. CSOs informed the ODIHR EOM that limited funding has reduced their capacity to conduct a comprehensive observation on election day. Electoral subjects, once registered, may appoint one observer to the respective CEAZs and VCCs, and to each ballot counting table.

## **XIV. ODIHR EOM ACTIVITIES**

The ODIHR EOM opened in Tirana with a press conference on 2 April 2025. The EOM has met with, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the CEC, SPAK, the General Prosecutor, AMA, leaders and representatives of political parties, civil society, media, and members of the diplomatic and international community. Long-term observers have been meeting stakeholders at the local level. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament have announced they will deploy observer delegations. The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office has appointed Farah Karimi (MP, Netherlands) as Special Coordinator for the mission.

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<sup>47</sup> Aromanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Egyptian, Greek, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Roma, and Serbian.

<sup>48</sup> Albania is party to the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities but not the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

<sup>49</sup> The Unity for Human Rights Party.

<sup>50</sup> The Alliance of Macedonians for European Integration Party and the Unity for Human Rights Party.