

New voting regulations in Albania: (too small) a step on the way to the EU

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The Albanian parliament adopted a new electoral code on 19 July. The adoption of new regulations in this area is one of the key conditions on which the EU has made granting candidate status to Albania dependent. The other requirements include: establishing political dialogue between the government and the opposition, improving the work of the legislature, ensuring the independence of the judiciary, effectively combating corruption and organised crime, respecting ownership rights, the protection of human rights and the rights of minorities, and better treatment for individuals detained by the police and kept at detention facilities and prisons. Albania, which applied for EU membership in 2009, has still not been granted candidate status. The European Commission in its evaluation of Albania's application has deemed that, given the low level of compliance with democratic standards, it cannot recommend the Council to grant Albania candidate status.

Commentary

- The reform introduces, for example: new rules for the election of the state electoral committee, electronic checking of voters' documents and electronic vote counting at the key polling stations. These changes are unlikely to improve the compliance with democratic standards in the parliamentary election scheduled for spring 2013. Since the abolishment of the communist regime in Albania, no election has met democratic standards. However, the EU representative in Tirana has admitted that the introduction of the recent changes is proof of better co-operation between the parliamentary forces and offers a greater chance for Albania to be granted EU candidate status this year. A decision to this effect will be passed in December and will certainly depend on the implementation of the adopted regulations.
- The bitter conflict between the largest political forces in Albania, the governing Democratic Party and the opposition Socialist Party, has prevented smooth reforms, and in particular passing such laws which require a two thirds majority to be adopted. Although all the parliamentary groupings have declared that their main goal is EU membership, this still does not translate into efficient implementation of EU recommendations. In November 2011, the largest political forces, under pressure from

the EU, reached an agreement envisaging the introduction of a reform package necessary to meet the criteria set by the EU. However, the rate at which these have been introduced indicates that the prospect of EU membership is not attractive enough to motivate the Albanian political parties to overcome the conflicts existing between them and to prepare reforms based on compromise to improve the functioning of their state. This means that the Albanian elite are less and less determined to ensure EU membership to their country.