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CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 25.05.2011 www.osw.waw.pl

Albania: the dispute over the results of the local election in the capital thwarts the chances of ending the political crisis

On 23 May the Central Election Commission of Albania (CEC) announced that after a recount of votes in the election for the mayor of Tirana, the winner was the candidate of the ruling Democratic Party of Albania (PD), Lulzim Basha. He received merely 81 votes more than the leader of the Socialist Party (PS) Edi Rama, who was seeking re-election. This verdict was challenged by the opposition, which will lead to a further escalation of the political conflict.

According to the initial results of the local election in Tirana, similarly as in most large towns in Albania, the election was won by the opposition candidate. However, CEC made a controversial decision to run a recount and include the votes that were at first considered invalid. This move tipped the scales in favour of the ruling party candidate. The decision to run a recount was met with stark criticism from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The opposition party PS took legal action against the decision and staged demonstrations across the country, accusing PD of manipulating the election results.

The CEC's controversial decision will trigger a further intensification of the fierce conflict between the largest political forces in Albania, which has been ongoing for two years. In 2009 the opposition reproached PD for rigging the parliamentary election. Growing doubts concerning the compliance of the election's organisation with democratic standards will quite likely hamper the process of Albania's integration with the EU. <MarSz>