

**REMARKS BY HEAD OF PRESENCE AT INTERNATIONAL ELECTION  
WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
*21 March 2018*

A very warm welcome. Thank you for joining us today for this meeting of the International Election Working Group. It is a pleasure to welcome here the two co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Committee on Electoral Reform of the Assembly.

I would like to start by praising the dedication and commitment of the Ad-Hoc Committee to get this up and running. I said it in other events that there is a need for a thorough and timely electoral reform, which will address the well-known ODIHR recommendations and will tackle key issues which affect democratic elections.

As ODIHR pointed out in its 2017 report, the Committee should prioritize work to address persistent issues of vote-buying. Widespread allegations of vote-buying have affected public trust and there is a need of political will to counteract the phenomenon. We are paying special attention to the cases of electoral violations reported to the Prosecutor's Office. The three cases which have gone to court so far are a start, but only a start.

With regard to another big topic, new voting technologies, best practices indicate that decisions to use new voting technologies should not be made immediately applicable to the next elections, but should be test first. We have repeatedly suggested to do a test run in limited areas during the local elections 2019. And even for a limited test time is needed to allow for feasibility studies, testing, piloting, public confidence building, voter education, training of election officials in that context. Electronic voting may lower some risks for elections, but they will create new risks, for instance the risk of hacking if this is done online. It is up to Albania to decide whether the cost for this kind of voting is justifiable. From our point of view, we have been encouraging the use of electronic counting, which costs not very much and would be a contribution towards the de-politicization of the election administration.

Second big issue at the moment is out of country voting, where it is a big challenge to find the right balance between extending the right to vote to eligible voters living abroad and ensuring the integrity and security of the vote. There may simply be no link between the individual voter to his vote after he has voted. That needs a rather complicated system. We hope that the ad hoc committee will soon decide about the voting mechanism, whether by it is mail or embassies or whatever, and also the voting system, where the votes are counted, for instance in the capital or in the last constituency of residence or else. All this is necessary for further steps. International good practices show that internet voting practices are high risk due to cyber-attacks and also that the voter can be attributed to his vote.

So, these are the important decisions to be taken. I have seen a very ambitious plan of the committee on which our two guests are going to speak. As OSCE Presence here in the country we, of course, stand ready together with our colleagues from ODIHR and from other international organizations to support this process.