

## 10.20-11.30 – First session: ILIRJAN CELIBASHI

### **The influence of Covid19 Pandemic to the Albanian General Assembly Electoral Process**

The Covid19 Pandemic has not only disrupted human lives all across the world, but has posed a myriad of questions and issues to government and public systems globally. Albania was to organize general elections in one of the most demanding and unexpected times in the civilization history. The pandemic has presented one of the darkest scenarios for election organization at first, but also it has brought new opportunities and possibilities.

To make these elections even more interesting, the main Albanian political parties changed even the electoral code five months prior to the elections date. During the electoral process of April 25th 2021, essential freedom of peaceful assembly was respected, and electoral subjects could all campaign. However, at times, the COVID-19 preventive measures, including social distancing, were not always respected.

Procedures designating COVID-19 related measures on election day were approved in order to tackle the situation and safeguard the health of the electoral commissions in the field. In practice, COVID-19 measures may have hindered the unlimited entry into the country. On 19 April, the Minister of Health issued an order which required a mandatory 14-day self-quarantine for people entering Albania from North Macedonia and Greece, to protect the health of the population from COVID-19 transmission. Such a situation may have somehow affected the voters' turnout and may have closed the door to Albanian voters who live in the neighbor countries and could have planned to travel in order to vote on April 25.

Restrictions were imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including limitations on gatherings, distancing requirements and the use of facemasks, which created difficulties and curbed the campaign for all contestants. The leaders of the main political parties asserted at the start of the campaign, their intentions to respect COVID-19 distancing protocols. However, at some rallies, contenders were less observant of distancing and maximum attendance rules. The application of measures for breach of COVID-19 related regulations was not applied consistently by the police, and non-compliance with COVID-19 regulations during most events was permitted.

The hearings by the CSC and the Electoral College were held in person, due to COVID-19 restrictions, but only parties to the case and a limited number of observers were allowed to be present. The sessions of the CSC were livestreamed through the CEC website. Voters who had contracted the COVID-19 and those in self-isolation were required to comply with the rules of isolation, resulting in their inability to vote. According to the Ministry of Health, the number of persons hospitalized or in self-isolation due to COVID-19 infections on election day was around 22,000.