

Albania and the Efforts of the OSCE in 1997

Conditions in Albania

The state of violent anarchy that Albania has been in since the beginning of 1997 and which as this article goes to press has still not been overcome was initially a completely misunderstood phenomenon in the rest of Europe. There are still echoes of the amazement people felt over the fact that the disappointment of investors cheated in fraudulent investment funds drove a government from office, undid years of work in building public institutions and almost destroyed an entire state. These events were unexpected in Europe. In the summer of 1996 one could still hear positive assessments of Albanian developments from European diplomats in Tirana. A country report of the Deutsche Bank¹ - a document which is after all meant to provide investors with a reasonably dependable evaluation of local conditions - delivered a positive assessment of Albanian developments even in November 1996. A few weeks later the violent riots in Tirana and Vlore broke out.

Even in the Albanian public there were few warning voices to be heard in 1996. Still, the eruption at the turn of the year did not surprise everyone. In lengthy conversations with people familiar with the political scene one could even hear precise predictions about what would occasion the collapse and the form it would take.²

In the course of this century Albania has several times experienced phases of violent anarchy that were very much like the conditions of 1997, most recently when the communist regime collapsed in 1991. Even then the destructive rage was not directed at the hated holders of political power alone but at the institutions of the state and indeed at the whole public sphere. In 1991 it was not only most of the factories in the country that were subjected to demolition and devastation but the schools as well and even the irrigation systems, which are essential for agriculture in this dry Mediterranean country - institutions, in other words, which (unlike the schools) are entirely devoid of ideological character and fulfil their good purpose under any kind of political conditions.³ It was a rebellion against socialization in general and not just against socialization under the dictatorial conditions of Stalinism that the Albanians had had to put up with

1 DB Research in: Deutsche Bank AG (Ed.), Osteuropa-Themen No. 166 of 11 November 1996.

2 Cf. Land der falschen Etiketten [The Country of False Labels], in: Die Zeit of 1 November 1996.

3 Cf. Dardan Gashi/Ingrid Steiner, Albanien: archaisch, orientalisches, europäisch [Albania: Archaic, Oriental, European], Vienna 1994, pp. 27f.

for 47 years. In this, the Albanian rebellion differed from all others in the transition countries. This difference was not understood in the West. Rather, the fact that the Albanians overshot their assumed political target by so far was explained as a result of the especially violent rage against a particularly hard dictatorship.

In point of fact, the special characteristics of the Albanian situation do not for the most part have their origin in the communist phase from 1944 to 1991. On the contrary, they were fully developed even before that and indeed help to explain most of the special features of Albanian communism. The uniformity of communist ideology, its emotional appeal to revolutionary overthrow and new beginnings, mislead us into vastly overestimating its historical power. The fact that every political move was "derived", i.e. put in relation (often with elaborate arguments) to the principles of "historical and dialectical materialism" or to the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Enver Hoxha, obscured one's view of the real laws governing the functioning of Albanian society. Indeed, it was almost impossible to study them because there was no pluralistic approach to scholarship in the country and foreign observers had no chance to take a close look at Albanian conditions.

When Albania became independent in 1913 the national movement of the Albanians was still weak. It owed its independence primarily to the strategic interests of the European great powers who needed a barrier against Serbian and Russian aspirations to gain access to the Mediterranean. They did not ask themselves whether there was an Albanian nation capable of providing a foundation for the new state. Because its inhabitants spoke the same language, had certain cultural interests in common and did not feel that they belonged to other peoples, Albania was assumed to be "ethnically" homogeneous and its population predestined to build a national state. This was the first fundamental misunderstanding that Europe visited upon an Albania which then was still unknown. European nationalisms - including those in the Balkans - were understood to be an expression of linguistic, cultural, and also genealogical (or "racial") commonality. That the rise of national movements and national states also demonstrated a degree of socialization and corresponded to a more or less common development was overlooked. Just as the Germans, British or French saw themselves in terms of their language and culture, they identified others in the same way, so that the world - or at least Europe - looked like a synchronous unity of nations. Universal cultural accomplishments such as statehood, division of labour in manufacturing and mobility within a large territory - factors which are decisive in nation-building - not being distinctive, were left out of the equation. Thus, Albania was only viewed from the outside a national state. A huge discrepancy developed between the external and internal view of things. As part of the Ottoman Empire, today's Albania, like many parts of the Balkans, went untouched by the European Enlightenment. However, in contrast to virtually all of

the Balkan peoples, most of the Albanians shared the religion of those in charge of the Turkish state: 70 per cent of them belong today to the Muslim tradition. Unlike Catholic and Orthodox southern Slavs, the Catholic and Orthodox Albanians did not develop their religious individuality into a national identity. There were too few of them for that and they were economically too weak. The Orthodox Albanians in the south have remained until the present time subject to the Greek Patriarchate and are still regarded by Greece as "Greek" people. If they speak Albanian, they are simply viewed as "Albanianized" Greeks. There was never an "Albanian" Church that would have been in a position to initiate national awareness as the Serbian or Bulgarian Church had done. The Catholics, for their part, live mainly in remote mountain regions and have maintained little contact with the world of Catholicism. The Muslim confession, however, tied the Albanians to the Sublime Porte where they were repeatedly represented by high dignitaries. But in the Turkey of the Ottoman period there was no secular national movement the Albanians might have been forced to come to terms with, as, say, the Slovenes did with the nationalism of German liberalism. Thus there was no occasion for the Albanians to think in national terms out of spite.

Economic history explains conditions in Albania even more clearly than does the history of ideas.⁴ The traditional economic pursuit of the Albanians is extensive pastoral farming, the only kind possible in the barren mountain regions of the Balkans. Albania's plains were for a long time inaccessible owing to malaria. Because of this archaic form of economic activity, state structures were hardly necessary. Few tools were needed and no feudal power was required for the protection of property. Over large areas only the shepherds could provide for the protection of the herds. As in all societies where animal husbandry predominates, extremely patriarchal conditions developed. The people lived with relatives in multi-family households organized strictly according to a hierarchy of age. The highest authority belonged to the *pater familias*. One group of shepherds lived next to another and a social sphere with functional division and parallel hierarchies scarcely developed. Thus, the factor which might have modified the patriarchal family conditions was lacking - an entire sphere in which, historically, compromises and division of power are practised, and in which hierarchies based on function, education or wealth exist beside those based on the traditional family. It is a rule in social anthropology that a society is the more patriarchal the more of its functions are performed by the family.⁵ When functions are taken away from the family a process of emancipation begins within the family. If, for example, sacred functions are transferred from

4 This portrayal follows the seminal work of Karl Kaser, *Hirten, Kämpfer, Stammeshelden. Ursprünge und Gegenwart des balkanischen Patriarchats* [Shepherds, Fighters, Tribal Heroes. The Origins and Contemporary Character of the Balkan Patriarchate], Vienna/Cologne/Weimar 1992.

5 Cf. Michael Mitterauer/Reinhard Sieder, *Vom Patriarchat zur Partnerschaft. Zum Strukturwandel der Familie* [From Patriarchate to Partnership. On Structural Change in the Family], Munich 1984, pp. 112-115.

the paternal "house priest" to a special priestly estate, the patriarch, through the loss of this function, also loses a bit of his authority in the home. Ottoman rule even reinforced this situation over a period of centuries by granting self-administration to families and family groups while preventing the creation of larger units in the interest of protecting its own power and tax sovereignty. Thus the special relationship between Albanians and Turks exerted a highly conservative influence on patriarchal conditions. The Albanians played no significant role in Turkish politics and administration nor did they constitute an essentially different society - e.g. by virtue of a different religious faith. To use another social-anthropological term, Albanian society was "acephalous", i.e. lacking a head. While highly regulated social relationships prevailed in the family, the scene outside was characterized by a dangerous freedom under arms.

At its founding the Albanian state found no available structures to use. Whoever wanted to rule Albania had to depend, like a feudal lord, on the favour of powerful tribal chieftains. Faced with this situation, various persons tried, beginning in 1913, to create a functioning state in Albania. The first, the German Prince zu Wied, drew the obvious conclusion from the lack of political structures and national awareness and left the country after half a year. In the twenties an attempt was made by the Orthodox Bishop, Fan Noli, who had lived a long time in the United States, and by the northern Albanian tribal leader, Ahmed Zogu. Zogu managed to prevail only with the help of his private power base. His problems were establishing law and order, an armed population, control of the streets, the protection of public institutions - i.e. the problems of contemporary Albania down to the last detail. One detail which remains of interest today was Zogu's attempt to put through a state monopoly on the instruments of force. Zogu ordained a general disarmament but made an exception for his own tribe. If he had made any other decision his life would not have been secure. On the other hand, decisions of that kind made it impossible for the rest of the Albanians to believe in a neutral state. People viewed public institutions of any kind as an attempt on the part of an opposing tribe to seize power in their territory.

The Albanian Communist Party, which came to power in 1944, had done no more than to achieve a certain position through guerrilla warfare. Previously it had been a tiny organization, dominated by a few intellectuals with ties to foreign countries. The communists had recognized that in order to retain power over the long term they would have to destroy the family structures. There were few allies they could count on in doing this. It was hard even to mobilize the oppressed women in the family associations. Thus the effort could only succeed through extreme repression. Liberalization of the kind seen in the Khrushchev era in the Soviet Union would have acutely jeopardized the Albanian communists' hold on power. At the same time, the regime's severity and cruelty deprived it of any chance to become popular. There was no third way. If the party

tried to distance itself from society like an order it would have to suppress the people all the more harshly and accept the hostility this would cause. But if it became more accessible it would become hopelessly caught up in the clan structures and put its legitimacy at risk. It was not one mistake or another that caused the Albanian communists to fail but the fundamental character of their experiment.

The communists succeeded, under dictatorial conditions, in bringing literacy to the country, industrializing it to a significant extent and setting up a public health service. Industrialization, in particular, destroyed the classic forms of community life. Workers were now living in small families. But the change was not deeply rooted and was often carried out only for form's sake. Hence, not only women but even the younger brothers of family patriarchs, even when they practised respected professions or held high office, continued to hand over their wages or salaries to the head of the family.⁶ Nevertheless, an educated stratum of society for whom the clan structures had little importance came into being for the first time. This class could not, however, depend on any pre-communist traditions. Its sense of identity bound it to the regime. At the same time, the highly authoritarian power structures of the regime drew on the experiences of the old patriarchal society; even the social sphere in which division of labour prevailed were from the very beginning subject to the strict communist hierarchy.

In contrast to the other Balkan countries, the "velvet revolution" in Albania could not rely on the traditions of a pre-war middle class or even on political emigrants. Any stimulus towards an opening, as in other less developed Balkan countries, had to come from the regime itself. Sali Berisha, for example, one of the leaders of the uprising and later President, was party secretary at the Medical College in Tirana. No other personnel were available. Opponents of the regime, from the forties on, were held along with their children and grandchildren in camps and deprived of all educational opportunities. Only communists were admitted to university study. On the other hand, it was not difficult in 1990 to mobilize support in regime circles for the regime's overthrow. The system collapsed from within. With its prohibitions against beards and television and its techniques of spying, it had been so terroristic that everyone up to and including the highest levels of the party felt it as a liberation when the changeover came. It was scarcely possible in that society to distinguish between "culprits" and "victims". The regime had mistreated almost everyone in equal measure and made accomplices of all. This is where the second fundamental misunderstanding on the part of the West is to be found. The murderous antagonism be-

6 Cf. Karl Kaser, *Jede Menge Familie. Der patriarchale Haushalt im Modernisierungsprozeß* [No End of Family. The Patriarchal Household in the Modernization Process], in: Helmut Eberhart/Karl Kaser, *Albanien. Stammesleben zwischen Tradition und Moderne* [Albania. Tribal Life between Tradition and Modernity], Vienna/Cologne/Weimar 1995, pp. 133-150.

tween "democrats" and "socialists" was viewed as an ideological problem; it opened the Cold War. In it lay an opportunity for Western democrats to play a role. They were finally in a position, as historical victors, to stand at the side of their political friends in little Albania, who had suffered terribly under communism. What they did not understand was that the political quarrel in Albania, on both sides, was made up almost exclusively of ex-communists who had begun to differ from one another only in the last few months of their political development.

Viewed from within - from Albania itself - the antagonism between the parties hardly calls for further explanation. It corresponds to the "patriarchal mentality" which ignores compromise and the division of power and in which closed systems with authoritarian leadership exist side by side. It is obvious that there are quarrels between such systems; they come to life without any ideological connotations. As party names the terms "democratic" and "socialist" are nothing more than trademarks without any real meaning. Surprisingly, anti-communism is not widespread in Albania. Judgements about the communist period are everywhere mitigated by shame. When Berisha had former communist leaders thrown into prison he deliberately made an exception for his own former patrons. This kind of behaviour, which seems corrupt to Europeans accustomed to the modern state, was immediately understood in Albania and also condoned by Berisha's supporters. It was seen as evidence of his magnanimity and his devotion to all who had assisted him. On the other hand, in summer of 1996 the "socialists" obliterated all memory not only of Hoxha but even of Marx and Engels. For years now they have been calling for Albania's membership in the EU and NATO and praising the free market economy. There are no political differences between the antagonistic big parties. The impression in 1996 was that both wanted to iron out their ideological hostilities so as to devote themselves completely to total competition. Albanians with foreign contacts point again and again to "differences in mentality" between Albanians and other Europeans; to a different system of values that puts loyalty and allegiance right at the top of the values hierarchy; and, above all, to an uncompromising character and the inability to admit mistakes. Joint ventures between Western European and Albanian partners usually fail because the Albanian partner cannot tolerate another boss next to him. Anything that does not fit the categories of superiority or subordination is strange and uncustomary.

The self-destructive or, more accurately, politically destructive forms of the uprisings in 1991 and 1997 seem to indicate that the population in both cases rejected the attempt of a clique to take over power with a claim of general representation. In both cases this general representation was understood as a mere pretext. The message in both 1991 and 1997 was the same: we don't want any state; we'll govern ourselves! In both cases the powerful were rightly accused of having promoted their own private interests along with the public ones. The

scenes in Vlore, where policemen were stoned, made very clear that a foreigner in uniform in Albania enjoys no more respect than any other foreigner. This has nothing to do with crime. On the contrary, the state is the scoundrel.

The third misunderstanding between Europe and Albania concerns the "pyramid companies" whose collapse between December 1996 and February 1997 precipitated the riots and the crisis of the state.

Following its election victory in March 1992, the "Democratic Party" under its then Chairman, Sali Berisha, drew up a pact to calm the situation in Albania down. It guaranteed economic prosperity and, in return, obtained a political truce. The socialists and the other opposition parties were the losers in this pact. In fact, however, economic production never really got going again after the collapse of 1991. Rather, the source of the "Albanian economic miracle" was foreign assistance, particularly from the EU, whose purpose was mainly to forestall mass flight from the country as in 1991 and prevent the emigration of young men seeking jobs.

After a failed constitutional referendum in 1994 President Berisha's regime became increasingly authoritarian. According to the OSCE Observer Mission, the parliamentary elections in May 1996 were neither free nor fair. But socialists themselves admitted in confidence that Berisha's party would have won even without cheating.

The democrats conducted their election campaign under the slogan: "Me ne fitojne te gjithë" - "with us everybody wins". It was not first and foremost the election victory which was meant by the word "win". The verb "fitoj" is understood first in a very material sense, as "earn" or "make a profit". The election slogan was believed because it had proved itself every month for more than four years. There was hardly a family in Tirana without someone who, on behalf of all, had invested money in "Vefa Holding". People took their money there, in Lek or US-Dollars, and got a receipt; whoever produced it at one of the Vefa branches in Tirana on a prescribed day of the month received his interest, just like a salary or pension, in the amount of eight and later ten per cent per month of the invested capital. With Berisha, so it seemed, everyone really did win. Three quarters of a year later, when everybody had lost everything, Berisha did not want to be one of the losers. The popular uprising did not put an immediate end to his term of office but it ended his rule. Berisha had broken the pact and was now to be punished. As in 1991, when, with the statue of Enver Hoxha on Skanderbeg Square, a system had collapsed, so another system fell now. The Vefa, which had advertised itself with the slogan "the Albanian miracle", was only the biggest money-collecting point in the country. Gjallica, Kamberi, Silva, M. Leka, Cenaj, Xhaferri, Populli - at the end there were close to thirty "companies" and "foundations" competing for the money of the Albanians. The Governor of the Central Bank, Kristaq Luniku, one of the few serious sources, estimates that 65 per cent of the money circulating in the country, whether in

Lek or US-Dollars, went through one of these firms. It was only the mathematical principle - not its significance - that the system had in common with the mysterious "pyramid games" in Russia and Romania or the "King's Club" in Germany. The Albanian firms were bank, pension insurance and unemployment insurance all wrapped into one and gave all of Albania an illusion of wealth that did not exist. Most of them did not begin as "pyramid games" either but as perfectly normal firms. Because there are no private banks in Albania even today and the state-run savings bank is overstrained by credits to private firms, new entrepreneurs had no alternative but to borrow money for their investments from their fellow citizens. The savings of these people, in turn, came from abroad.

For the most part the investors were not even particularly naive. "Holdings" and "companies" such as Vefa or Gjallica did without the mysterious aura of "pyramid games" in other countries. Instead, they presented themselves as big companies. Vefa, the biggest one, paraded its wealth and exaggerated it as well. It advertised that it had "profits of 180 to 200 million Dollars a year", thousands of acres of land, more than 30,000 head of livestock, 240 production projects, factories, mines, mills, super-markets, a sausage factory and a brewery. The Albanians were supposed to get the impression that they would profit from these businesses like shareholders. The state and the governing party dealt with these "successful entrepreneurs" in the way which is customary all over the world: they courted them, sunned themselves in their warmth and rejoiced in donations to the party. Vebi Alimuca, the legendary head of Vefa, appeared on television as the symbol of the new, free Albania, Prime Minister Alexander Meksi shook the brilliant businessmen's hands, and there is a voucher which identifies Gjallica from Vlore as having provided 50,000 US-Dollars for Berisha's election campaign in May 1996. Vefa and Gjallica were a part of the new Albania of Sali Berisha just as Volkswagen and AEG had been of post-war Germany. This was not understood in the West. When southern Albania was already in flames Alois Mock, the former Foreign Minister of Austria, insisted that he stood "at the side of his friends" in the Democratic Party, who were "not responsible for the collapse of firms". Formally that was correct; politically it was absurd. When 80 per cent of the people are affected the distinction between public and private no longer makes sense.

It was only after the popular uprising began that the opposition once again entered the fray. The Socialist Party along with the Social Democrats and the "Democratic Alliance", which had appeared jointly in 1996 as the "pole of the centre", boycotted the parliament and threatened to sink into insignificance. It was only the Socialist Party that had a functioning structure. But their representation at the local level had been significantly weakened in the local elections of October 1996. Accusations such as those made by Berisha that "the communists" had fomented the popular uprising were obviously absurd. In fact,

it was particularly the opposition who did not dare show themselves on the street during the riots in Vlore for fear of being taken immediately into custody by the secret police. The importance of the opposition did not lie in its role in the popular uprising. Rather, people began to think of them again because the pact with Berisha had been broken.

*The OSCE Mission*⁷

Underlying the OSCE mission, which began on 4 March 1997 with the appointment of Franz Vranitzky as Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office, was a strategic decision to give priority in the mediation work not to the violent conflict between state power dominated by Berisha and the people in the south of the country but to the political dispute between the President and government on the one hand and the largely marginalized opposition on the other. This decision was very risky because at that time the opposition was still trying, for the most part in vain, to take over leadership of the protest movement. There was very little evidence that a solution to the political problem would also mean the end of anarchy. Still, there was no alternative because security concerns made travel to the south impossible. Only once did Vranitzky meet, on an Italian warship, with representatives of the Citizens' Committees from southern Albanian cities who took a stand against the general anarchy but controlled local conditions only to a limited extent. On 27 March the OSCE issued a mandate for the establishment of a permanent Presence in Albania whose task was to co-ordinate the work of other international organizations there and to provide advice and assistance, particularly in connection with democratization, the media, human rights, and the preparation and monitoring of elections; and, furthermore "to explore other possibilities, including monitoring the collection of weapons". The Austrian diplomat Herbert Grubmayr was chosen as Vranitzky's Resident Deputy in Tirana. Vranitzky himself made irregular trips to Tirana for negotiations usually lasting several days. This arrangement was designed to limit the mediator's appearances to critical situations and thus to enhance his standing. Notwithstanding all the difficulties, the strategic situation at the beginning of the OSCE mission was favourable. Both the opposition and the people around Berisha welcomed (although for opposite reasons) the decision to give priority to the political conflict in Tirana. Berisha thought this would give him a free hand in the south. Because he was acting on the basis of a false assessment of the situation in the country he also thought he would win impending new elec-

7 The portrayal of the OSCE mission is based on conversations with Franz Vranitzky, Herbert Grubmayr and a number of other OSCE officials, the "Activity Reports" of the mission, and the author's own observations during a number of visits to Albania.

tions. The opposition's first interest, of course, was new elections, but not the re-establishment of the state power still controlled by Berisha. The Citizens' Committees in the south, on the other hand, were too weak to have a unified strategy. Vranitzky hoped that with a solution of the political crisis they would sooner or later integrate themselves into the existing party structures. During Vranitzky's first visit in Tirana the parties signed, on 9 March, a nine-point agreement that was to serve thereafter as a basis for OSCE mediation activity. The agreement itself came about without OSCE intervention. Among other things, it provided for a general amnesty for those who had participated in the riots of the past months, the establishment of an all-party transitional government, new elections by the end of June under "full international control", the return within a week of seized weapons, and the lifting, "as soon as possible", of the state of emergency. An all-party government was set up immediately. The office of Prime Minister was taken over by the former socialist mayor of Gjirokastra, Bashkim Fino. However, the notion that the signatory parties had the power to disarm the opposition in the south was pure fiction. Even so, Berisha called for disarmament again and again in the following months. The fact that it did not happen was used as an argument for maintaining the state of emergency. The agreement to hold new elections represented an important victory for the opposition. Berisha was forced to agree to them when it became clear that no international organization and no important partner state was prepared to compete for the OSCE's mediatory role. Just the year before Berisha had with some success used reports on the 1996 parliamentary elections which differed substantially from one another to cast doubt on the role of the OSCE and particularly that of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The background to this policy of playing people off against each other is the far-reaching identification of many conservative and Christian Democratic parties in Europe with Berisha's "Democratic Party", which is even a full member of the "European Democratic Union". Among European governments Berisha was regarded, at least until the riots broke out, as a guarantor of stability. By the beginning of March he was obviously no longer able to fulfil this function. And after the failed military operation against the south most of Berisha's political friends in Europe turned away from him. Vranitzky even reports that some governments favoured the quick removal of Berisha and called for an impeachment process. Vranitzky opposed such ideas because concurrent attempts to unseat Berisha would, in his opinion, have made his mediatory mission impossible.

Beginning in the middle of April a "Multinational Protection Force" of six to seven thousand men was deployed in the country. It was sent there under the terms of a UN Security Council mandate by a "coalition of the willing" co-ordinated by Italy. Italy itself contributed the largest group, just about half; addi-

tional participants were France, Greece, Turkey, Spain, Romania, Austria and Denmark. According to its mandate the Force's job was to protect deliveries of assistance, but it turned out shortly after the mandate had been issued that these were unnecessary. The way the Protection Force was put together also involved a substantial risk because five of the eight "willing" states were neighbours of Albania or for historical reasons had a special interest in that country. Thus the Greeks and Italians, in particular, had a direct interest in avoiding floods of refugees. Participating in the Protection Force made it possible for them to secure their own borders on foreign territory. Finally, "infiltration" by the Greek secret service played a large and ever increasing role in the propaganda of the Berisha party. But in practice there were no problems. On the contrary, the presence of the Force had a calming effect on the situation. It fulfilled an important function when it escorted the international observers on election day. It also acquired significance by giving rise to widespread discussion in the participating countries. Through difficult parliamentary debates it became indirectly clear that there was little willingness under the prevailing circumstances to go on spending more money on Albania - on a country, that is, which of all transitional countries got by far the highest level of financial support from the EU and, on a world-wide basis, received more assistance per capita than any other country except Namibia. It was only after these debates that Vranitzky was able to threaten Tirana credibly with the cessation of international assistance.

The first significant crisis of the mediatory mission occurred immediately after its first important success. On 9 May the governing parties had concluded a six-point framework agreement on the election law. Then, on the evening of 12 May after Vranitzky had already left, the majority of "Democrats" in parliament tabled the draft of an election law that had not been discussed with either the other parties or the international advisers. Vranitzky's public reaction was sharp; he warned the sides to work for consensus without leaving any doubt that it was the Democrats who had broken the agreement and he threatened a cut-off of international assistance. The other parties announced an election boycott. Under the pressure of Vranitzky's threat Berisha partly came around. A number of "amendments" to the election law, which had already been passed, altered the wording in ways desired by the opposition. The main points at issue were the make-up of the Election Commissions and the relationship between elements of the election law involving majority and proportional representation. A solution was finally found and passed according to which the most important election protocols at all levels had to be signed by representatives of both political camps. Berisha, with his independent draft, had put his reliance on the majority vote system which in the previous year had given his party 87 per cent of the seats in parliament. The opposition wanted a larger share of the seats to be distributed according to the principle of proportional representation. A compromise was finally found by arranging for the parliament to be enlarged by 25

additional seats although almost three times as many seats were still allotted to the majority as to the proportional system. Berisha finally agreed to compromise because it was clear that Vranitzky would hold him responsible for a failure of the elections and neither his power position at home nor his influence abroad were strong enough to deal with such a verdict. His attempt to put through a majority vote system also shows that at that time Berisha grotesquely overestimated his support within the population. Ultimately, the "winner-takes-all" effect of the majority vote system came to work completely to the detriment of his party.

After the fight over the election law the last bit of trust between the parties had been exhausted and Berisha's opponents began to view even the smallest offences and discrepancies as evidence of an attempt at a big, new election fraud. The revelation that the Italian Ambassador, behind Vranitzky's back, had made agreements over the telephone with the Chairman of the Democratic Party, Tritan Shehu, on preventing any change in the election law also contributed to mistrust towards the international community. The fact that the Ambassador was called home immediately after his intrigue became known was hardly sufficient to restore trust. The Chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Skender Gjinushi, for example, was firmly convinced that Berisha, sensing an impending defeat, would arrange for incidents on election day itself so as to ensure the failure of the elections. For that reason the parties made an urgent appeal to the OSCE either to carry out the elections itself along the lines of the Bosnian model or to provide an observer for every one of the 4,700 polling stations. The OSCE had to reject this request. It was not possible, in such a short time and without the support of a large international force in the country, to administer the elections, nor could 4,700 observers, each of whom would have needed at least a two-man escort, be mobilized. In the end the number of observers - about 300 - fell far short of what the opposition had expected. Only with difficulty was Vranitzky able to convince the opposition that they would have nothing to gain from a boycott. Thus the election took place under a serious risk of failure and of a new outbreak of violence.

But 29 June 1997, the tensely awaited first-round election day, stayed remarkably calm. One member of an Election Commission, a Democrat, was shot. However, in the preceding weeks and months between five and twenty people had lost their lives every day. On the eve of the election, before any official result was available, Fatos Nano, the Chairman of the Socialists, announced his party's victory. The basis of this report was the party's telephone network. Nano exploited the dynamics of the situation. In the 1996 parliamentary elections Berisha had declared his Democrats the victors even before the polling stations closed. By way of contrast, politicians of the Democrats now conceded their defeat on election day eve. The three-person steering committee for the monitoring of the elections, made up of representatives of the OSCE, EU and Council of

Europe under the leadership of the former Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Catherine Lalumière, described the elections - owing to the various obstructions, particularly in the "rebellious" south but also in parts of the north - not as free and fair but as "adequate and acceptable". As a consequence Berisha resigned, even though he had been elected by parliament at the beginning of March for another five years, thus freeing the way for the election of the Socialist Rexhep Mejdani. The OSCE's mediatory mission had been successful. The first European dictatorship following the end of the bloc confrontation disappeared without a war. Vranitzky announced his willingness to continue in his functions until the international conference on Albania scheduled for the end of September in Rome. The success of the mission would certainly not have been possible without a fair amount of luck. It should not be overlooked, however, that these fortunate circumstances could only come about because the OSCE made a vital strategic decision right at the beginning, because it was supported by all participating States and other international organizations, because the Representative Vranitzky displayed strong nerves at critical moments and because the advisory and observer mission - after a chaotic beginning - proved equal to the substantial organizational demands that emerged from the unclear legal situation and the constantly shifting negotiating scene.

As this article goes to press the anarchy in the country has still not been overcome. The business of setting up a legitimate and recognized state authority is still in its infancy. As time goes on the Democratic Party under its General Secretary, Genc Pollo, is casting more and more doubt on the legitimacy of the election. Neutral authorities continue to have a hard time. The fundamental factors that led to this and earlier conflicts were not affected by the OSCE's successful mediation. All that happened was that Albania was prevented from falling into a condition of permanent ungovernability as a result of the latest crisis. The present situation is no more than an opportunity. It can be seized by taking determined steps to build a civil society with democratic institutions and by developing and supporting independent media, free initiatives and non-governmental organizations.