

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001478/24
to the Commission
Yannis Maniatis (S&D)
(5 August 2024)**

Subject: Irregularities noted during the repeat municipal election in Himara

A repeat municipal election was held on 4 August in the ethnic Greek minority town of Himara, in Northern Epirus, after the results of the election on 14 May 2023 were cancelled on spurious grounds, because the minority candidate Fredis Beleris won, beating the ruling party's favourite.

Yesterday's elections saw the candidate of the ruling party win, with Omonoia, the party representing the Greek minority, reporting a host of irregularities that were aimed solely at altering the results.

Specifically:

1. Changes were made to the electoral register, with 311 new voters being registered;
2. Voters whose ID cards had expired were not allowed to vote, a condition which had not applied in any previous elections. This change in the voting conditions was announced last minute, essentially denying 6 000 citizens the right to vote;
3. There were incidents of violence and verbal attacks, as well as attempts made by members of the municipal authority and the ruling party to influence voters.

Bearing in mind that Albania is an accession country and that the property rights of the members of the Greek minority in Albania are being threatened by the despotic acts of the central government and the local administration which it controls, can the Commission answer the following:

1. Will it examine the complaints put forward by Omonoia concerning the irregularities in yesterday's municipal elections?
2. What could it do to help protect the property rights of the Greek ethnic minority in Albania in an effective manner?

Submitted: 5.8.2024

**Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(29 November 2024)**

The Commission took note that the repeat municipal election took place in Himara on 4 August 2024. Holding transparent, inclusive and credible elections in line with international standards is a key requirement for any country aspiring to join the EU. A number of complaints by representatives of political parties were dealt with by the Albanian complaint mechanisms.

The Commission also took note that the Electoral College decided to uphold the decision of the Central Election Commission's Sanctions and Complaints Committee which had dismissed the opposition coalition's request to invalidate the results of the Himara by-elections and repeat the mayoral by-elections in the municipality.

The EU will continue to encourage the Albanian authorities to address all outstanding recommendations from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Venice Commission on the electoral law process.

The Commission attaches the highest importance to the respect of the rule of law and fundamental rights, including the protection of property rights in Albania. It will continue to closely monitor electoral developments in Albania.

In its 2024 Rule of law Report, in the Albanian Country Chapter, the Commission stated that overall corruption is prevalent in many areas, including during electoral campaigns, and found that preventive measures suffer from an overly complex legal framework and continue to have a limited impact, particularly in vulnerable sectors ⁽¹⁾.

Through the Stabilisation and Association process and the Enlargement process, the Commission also follows closely the protection of national minorities and the consolidation of property rights in Albania and assesses progress through its annual report ⁽²⁾.

As part of the European integration process of Albania, the EU closely monitors and supports the consolidation of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights in the country.

⁽¹⁾ SWD(2024) 828 final, 2024 Rule of Law Report, Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Albania, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/0154dce1-5026-45de-8b37-e3d56eff7925_en?filename=59_1_58088_coun_chap_albania_al.pdf

⁽²⁾ SWD(2023) 690 final, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_690%20Albania%20report.pdf
