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## **NDI MISSION SEES POTENTIAL FOR DEMOCRATIC ALBANIAN ELECTIONS**

TIRANA – While Albania has significantly improved its electoral framework, the success of June’s parliamentary polls will depend on how well political polarization and manipulation of the process are held in check, according to the findings of a National Democratic Institute (NDI) pre-election assessment mission released here today.

“An election that merits public confidence on the basis of democratic standards is within grasp,” the delegation said. “The principal tasks are for the leading political parties to ensure that the election process is free of undue partisan interference and manipulation, and for the electorate to participate energetically in the election process—as voters, advocates, and observers—to promote transparency and accountability that can lead to higher public confidence in the conduct of the elections.”

The delegation, which visited Albania from March 17-22, was comprised of Howard Dean, former governor of Vermont and former chair of the Democratic National Committee; Lousewies van der Laan, former member of the Netherlands Parliament and the European Parliament; Ellen Weintraub, chair of the United States Federal Election Commission; Robert Benjamin, NDI regional director for Central and Eastern Europe, and Ana Kadovic, resident director of NDI/Albania.

The purpose of the delegation was to assess election preparations, review the overall political environment shaping the election cycle, examine factors favoring or hindering a democratic expression of the will of the people, and offer recommendations to enhance the credibility of the election process. It held meetings with high level government officials, including the president and prime minister of Albania; political party representatives and the speaker of the Assembly; as well as election and local officials, and representatives of citizen election observer groups, women’s, youth, and disability rights organizations, media and the international community.

“The degree to which Albania’s citizens view these elections as credible turns largely on the extent to which the entire electoral process is administered in a professional and nonpartisan manner,” the delegation said. “But a democratic election can also be placed beyond reach if the present level of political polarization and the prospect of political manipulation of the process are not checked.”

During a press conference to announce the findings, Governor Dean stated, “There has been great progress over the past 20 years in Albania’s transition to democracy. The political system is maturing. The parties have passed a strengthened electoral law that provides for a good framework for elections. Now, they bear responsibility for conducting themselves in a manner that builds public confidence in Albania’s democratic process.” He added that civic engagement in the elections, particularly in a strong voter turnout and robust monitoring of the process, is essential to achieving a democratic election.

The mission was funded by the National Endowment for Democracy.

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