

PRESS RELEASE, 8 MARCH 1994

THE ELECTIONS IN KAZAKHSTAN, 7 MARCH 1994

A delegation representing the Parliamentary Assembly of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe visited Kazakhstan from March 4-8 to observe the parliamentary elections upon the invitation of the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan. While the delegation appreciated the attempt by the Government of Kazakhstan to move toward a democratic system through the conduct of elections, and commends Kazakhstan for inviting international observers, the general assessment of the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly was that the elections did not meet internationally accepted standards for free and fair elections.

On the positive side, the fact that elections were held, that opposition parties and candidates campaigned and expressed their views, and that international observers were invited indicates a desire on the part of the Government of Kazakhstan to move toward democracy and has taken steps in that direction. Unfortunately, their efforts fell short of the standards which CSCE Parliamentarians generally regard as necessary for the establishment of a pluralistic democratic system. The goal of free and fair elections in Kazakhstan was not reached.

The CSCE Parliamentary delegation observed a number of deficiencies which led to the conclusion that they have reached. Included in these shortcomings and deficiencies were:

1. The elections were called upon short notice and did not give political parties and candidates sufficient time to organize and conduct effective campaigns.
2. The system for registration of parties was difficult and severely flawed. Some electoral commissions disqualified parties and candidates in an arbitrary and capricious manner and provided insufficient recourse for appeal or reversal of such decisions.

3. The State List appointed by the President, has the effect of appointment of over twenty per cent of the Parliament by the Government. This violates the basic CSCE standards which the Government had agreed to uphold by signing and accepting CSCE documents, including the Charter of Paris and the Helsinki Final Act.
4. The CSCE Parliamentary observers were particularly critical of the practice, which apparently was universally applied, of allowing one individual to cast votes for several voters by simply presenting their passports to the officials at the polling place. A general estimate was that between thirty-five and fifty per cent of the votes were cast in this manner according to the lists compiled at the polling places visited by the delegation.
5. The maintenance of double lists, one kept at the polling place and another carried out of the polling place provided opportunity for double voting and could have made the results of polling places where this occurred invalid. In at least two instances, election judges indicated that members of the commission took portable voting boxes to homes trying to urge and encourage people to vote. All of this was done out of the view of observers, pollwatchers, candidates and security guards.
6. The pre-election campaign failed to meet basic standards of fairness, not only due to the arbitrary disqualification of parties and candidates, but also due to the severe limitations on resources available to opposition parties and candidates and to the unfair advantages provided to the Government-sponsored candidates by local authorities.
7. It appeared that many voters did not understand the procedures, were confused by the balloting system, and were unfamiliar with the parties and the candidates. The lack of preparation and information available to the electorate made an informed democratic choice difficult, if not impossible.
8. In Kapchugai, observers were told that there were thirteen "open" polling places

and three "closed" polling places. The "closed" polling places were located on a military base where 5,000 voters, nearly twenty per cent of the voters in Kapchugai, were located. The observers were denied permission to visit these polling places and were told that no pollwatchers were permitted there.

Understanding the potential for abuse by military authorities directly responsible to the Government, CSCE Parliamentary observers believe that this is a serious flaw in the electoral system of Kazakhstan.

9. The system for distribution and control of ballots was particularly weak. In many instances, many more ballots than were needed were distributed to polling places and there was no system to ensure that unused ballots were counted and destroyed in order to avoid the "stuffing" of ballot boxes. In many cases, the urns were not guarded constantly and the portable ballot boxes were carried out of the polling places and, upon their return, were placed in rooms out of view of observers and pollwatchers.
10. The independent press was apparently denied the opportunity to publish and broadcast through denial of paper for printing and broadcast time on both radio and television. There were some instances of harassment and intimidation by the authorities of independent media which was critical of the activities of local election commissions, particularly in Almaty and Karaganda.

For these and other reasons, the CSCE Parliamentary delegation has concluded that the elections in Kazakhstan failed to meet internationally accepted standards for pluralistic democratic elections.

During their visit to Kazakhstan, the CSCE Parliamentary observers met with candidates, representatives of political parties, officials of electoral commissions on both the national and local levels, with the Chairman of the Supreme Court, the Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan, representatives of independent press and media, independent experts and consultants working in Kazakhstan, diplomatic representatives posted in Kazakhstan and with other international observers.

On election day, six teams of CSCE Parliamentary observers visited more than fifty polling places in Almaty, Kapchugai, Issyk, and several other towns and villages in the

Almaty region. Observer teams were present for the opening and closing of several polling places and observed the counting of ballots.

The delegation consisted of: Mr Jan van Houwelingen, Head of Delegation, Member of the Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Netherlands, Mr Vedat Sakalla, MP, Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Bulgaria, Mr Thomas Svoboda, MP and Mr Milan Loukota, MP Czech Republic, Mr Michel Voisin, Deputy, Assemblée Nationale and Mme Anne Frago, Administrator, Assemblée Nationale, France, Mr Hans-Dirk Bierling, Member of the Bundestag, Germany, Mr Ricardas Zurinkas, MP, Lithuania, Ms Kristina Svensson, MP, Member of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs, Sweden, Mr Münif Islamoglu, Head of Turkish CSCE Group and Mr Hüseyin Kerimoglu, Interpreter, Turkey. Mr R Spencer Oliver, Director and Gina Dark, from the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly Secretariat also participated.

For further information on 8 March, Mr R Spencer Oliver and Gina Dark can be contacted in Almaty on the following numbers: 648295 or 648542. They can then be contacted via the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly Secretariat:

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