



**ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

**KYRGYZ ELECTIONS COMPETITIVE BUT FELL SHORT OF OSCE
COMMITMENTS IN IMPORTANT AREAS**

BISHKEK, 28 February 2004 - The 27 February Kyrgyz parliamentary elections fell short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections in a number of important areas.

Despite positive aspects such as competitiveness and a calm and orderly election day, substantial shortcomings remain, concluded the International Election Observation Mission, in its preliminary findings and conclusions today. The Mission consisted of some 175 observers from 28 countries.

"These elections were more competitive than previous ones, but sadly this was undermined by vote buying, de-registration of candidates, interference with media and a worryingly low confidence in judicial and electoral institutions on the part of voters and candidates," said Kimmo Kiljunen, Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation and appointed by the OSCE Chairman in Office as the Special Co-ordinator of the short-term observers.

The Mission is a joint undertaking of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament.

Francesco Enrico Speroni, Head of the delegation of the European Parliament, said: "The voting and counting was peaceful and orderly and we welcome in particular the publication of polling station result protocols on the website of the Central Election Commission. It is a sign of increased transparency."

Observers visited over 650 polling stations on election day. Although the election was conducted in an overall orderly manner, there were a few cases of crowding and long queues. Observers assessed the voting and counting as poor or very poor in a notable 11 per cent of polling stations. The main problems were inaccurate voter lists, unauthorized persons in polling stations and family voting. There were also incidents of vote buying, pressure on voters and multiple voting.

Several shortcomings during the pre-election campaign affected the overall conduct of the elections. Repeated warnings by high officials of the dangers of potential civil war as well as associating the opposition with extremism had a negative effect on the election campaign. Interpretation of the Election Code was at times unduly restrictive and de-registration of candidates was inconsistent, causing significant public protests.

The legal framework was partially improved and the Central Election Commission took steps to increase transparency in its work and organise popular voters meetings. However, voter lists were inaccurate and at times inaccessible for voters and observers. In spite of genuine competitiveness in many constituencies and possibilities for candidates to convey their messages on State media, there were cases of freedom of expression and assembly being infringed upon.

Ambassador Lubomir Kopaj, who heads the OSCE/ODIHR long-term mission, urged Kyrgyz authorities to rectify some of the shortcomings in time for the second round of the elections. "We call on them to halt de-registration of candidates on minor technical grounds, to refrain from interference with media and not to make further inflammatory statements, accusing their opponents of extremism. These are steps that can be taken immediately and would greatly improve the second round."