



Press Release

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Parliamentary Assembly
12 November 2000

Observations and recommendations in Bosnia and Herzegovina elections

SARAJEVO, 12 November 2000 -- This is the joint statement of the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe. The statement is issued prior to the completion of the counting of votes and the issuing of the results. Both Assemblies may issue their final reports at a later stage. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe also associates itself with the findings and conclusions of this statement.

The Delegation of the OSCE PA was led by Mr. Bruce George, MP (UK), Vice-President of the OSCE PA and Chairman of the Defence Committee of the British House of Commons. The Delegation of the CoE PA was headed by Ms. Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold, MP (Switzerland), President of the Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau of the CoE PA. The CLRAE Observer Delegation was led by Mr. Keith Whitmore (UK). (Composition of all three Delegations is below)

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

- BiH is still undergoing a difficult conflict resolution process following the war. This still affects political life in the country.
- The political atmosphere in BiH remains tense. The campaign was harsh and a number of negative incidents took place, including cases of hatred speeches, attempts to undermine the Dayton Agreement and attempts of fraud. However, in general the campaign took place peacefully and without major incidents.
- The consolidation of democracy in BiH was seriously undermined by the political parties' failure to agree on an Election Law. Therefore the new rules and regulations again had to be passed by the Provisional Election Commission (PEC). These new rules and regulations included important improvements to the previous electoral rules and regulations, such as the possibility to choose the candidate inside a party list (open system), multiparty constituencies, preferential system in some cases and the improvement of transparency.
- The performance of the media was considerably improved, compared to previous elections, even if further improvement is still hoped for future elections to ensure that the electorate will receive a balanced view.
- The administration and conduct of the elections had improved from all previous elections in BiH and they were of a high standard.
- The election monitoring delegations congratulate the OSCE and, in particular, the thousands of citizens of BiH for their excellent performance in organizing these general elections.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

New Election Law

The two Parliamentary Assemblies strongly appeal to the new Parliament of BiH to adopt, as a matter of priority, a new Election Law. In this work the Parliament should consider implementing the improvements that are included in the present rules and regulations, such as the open voting system, multiparty constituencies, preferential

systems and increased transparency. In these elections the transparency will be improved by the PEC's commitment to provide information on provisional results as soon as such information is available. The establishment of one Counting Centre, instead of two, is also expected to improve transparency and efficiency of the counting process and shows that the trust between entities has improved.

The two Parliamentary Assemblies will follow closely the debate on the new Election Law and they stand ready to give support and assistance to the Parliament of BiH in this matter.

It is essential that the Election Commission of BiH, based on the new law, be established as soon as possible to take over the responsibilities of organizing future elections. The international community, including the OSCE and the Council of Europe, has to remain closely involved in the transition process and provide advice and support. Failure to achieve the highest possible standard in future elections would seriously undermine the democratic process in BiH, and it would also damage its international reputation.

Election Campaign and Media

The political atmosphere during the campaign was harsh. This was reflected by a number of incidents, such as "hatred speeches", attempts at organized fraud and efforts to undermine the Dayton Agreement. Several such cases have been referred to the Election Appeals Sub-Commission and they will be investigated. However, the campaign was peaceful and no violent incidents were reported.

Unlike in previous election campaigns, which were characterized and marred by heated nationalistic rhetoric, the voters were this time mostly concerned about how to improve their daily life by promoting economic progress, creating jobs and developing social security. At the same time the nationalistic political parties attempted to hold on to their voters by stirring up animosities.

The HDZ and associated parties attempted to hold a "referendum" in connection of the elections in the Croat dominated areas. Even if the right to express one's opinions is an essential element of democracy, attempt to use the general elections in this manner and in violation of the rules and regulations, was unacceptable and did not serve to promote a constructive dialogue and positive atmosphere. The Election Appeals Sub-Commission will also deal with this matter.

In general the media behaved in a more balanced and professional manner. The Delegations hope that this positive development will continue.

Procedures in polling stations during voting

Because several elections were held simultaneously for different institutions in BiH, the voting procedures were rather complicated. Each voter received from two to four ballots. This problem, however, appeared to be mostly solved by an information and education campaign prior to the elections and by the polling station officials' readiness and capability to offer information and advice.

The observers were very impressed by the performance of the officials at the polling stations, who appeared to be well trained and competent. This increased the confidence in the BiH's capability to manage all future elections entirely on their own.

The observers were also pleased to see a high number of domestic and international observers, including women and young people. Their presence and active participation strengthens public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

During the Election Day the 50 observers from the two Parliamentary Assemblies and the CLRAE visited more than 300 polling stations in different parts of BiH, including both entities. According to their findings the voting took place, in general, peacefully and in an orderly manner. The officials observed the rules and regulations in a professional commendable manner. Good order was maintained and the secrecy of vote was respected. No cases of violence or intimidation were reported.

However, a number of incidents and shortcomings were reported, including a minor number of late openings, inaccurate supply of ballot papers, a misprint on a ballot and over crowdedness of some polling stations.

The observers of the three Delegations were politely received at the polling stations ranging from formal to friendly.

The three Delegations were able to monitor the counting in the polling stations only. That took place in an orderly manner and in accordance with the rules and regulations. The representatives of the Assemblies will not be able to stay in BiH to monitor the procedure in the Counting Centre and the tabulation of the results. However, they will remain in contact with those responsible for the counting process in order to obtain information about this, and they have confidence in the large number of domestic observers who will monitor the entire counting process.

The two Parliamentary Assemblies are confident that these elections, representing significant improvement to all previous elections, are an important step forward in the long and difficult way to consolidate democracy and fully implement the Dayton Agreement. The newly elected leadership of BiH must depart from the narrow nationalism and policy of confrontation. They must build coalitions capable of making the institutions function according to the principles of democracy and human rights.

Members of the three Delegations offer their support and cooperation to their elected colleagues in Bosnia and Herzegovina. BiH must take its full place as an equal member of the European family of Nations.

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