

# Press release

## General elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina largely in line with international standards

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SARAJEVO, 6 October 2002 - Yesterday's general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina were largely in line with international standards, considering the country's unique constitutional framework, concluded the International Election Observation Mission in a statement issued today. Over 400 international observers monitored the first election administered by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina since the Dayton Peace Agreement signed in 1995.

"These elections mark important progress toward the consolidation of democracy and rule of law under domestic control", said Pieter de Crem, Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office for these elections and head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation.

"These elections - the first since Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the Council of Europe earlier this year - are a positive step towards meeting the country's obligations which it assumed upon joining the organization", said Baroness Hooper, the head of the delegation of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.

"We call on all those elected yesterday to continue the process of national reconciliation and to create conditions for sustainable return", added Doris Pack, the head of the European Parliament's delegation. "We encourage all newly elected politicians to assume ownership of the process of tackling the country's main challenges by implementing the necessary economic and legal reforms, and to co-operate in mutual trust for the strengthening of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina."

"The new national election administration has successfully passed its first test, but the final judgement will depend on the results of the tabulation and the complaints processes. These need to be completed efficiently and swiftly", added Peter Eicher, head of the Observation Mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

The international observers noted that in what was a broad and active campaign involving 57 political parties, candidates were able to move unhindered and they engaged in substantially more cross-entity campaign activities than during previous elections. Nationalist rhetoric was less overt in this campaign but remained an underlying issue. An active print and electronic media provided extensive and diverse coverage.

The adoption of election legislation and the creation of electoral administration bodies at

the national level resulted in a normalization of the electoral process after years of direct international supervision. However, the elections were held within a unique constitutional framework in which ultimate responsibility still rested with the international community. As in previous elections, the international community took a number of steps affecting key aspects of the electoral process which, while in line with its mandate, would have been irregular by international standards under other circumstances. Such measures will hopefully be unnecessary in future elections.

Shortcomings included the highly negative and often personalized nature of the campaign with little meaningful debate on reform issues, and the failure of the authorities to make timely decisions on a number of important electoral issues. The long-term mission also noted considerable distrust among party officials as regards important aspects of the electoral process, including the complaints procedure, the composition of polling station committees and the counting process for absentee and out-of-country ballots.

On election day, the voting took place in a calm and peaceful atmosphere, and the voting procedures were conducted generally in a well-ordered and efficient way. Overall, the election administration was impressive.