



**INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
ELECTION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2 - 3 January 2000**

PRESS RELEASE

Zagreb, 4 January 2000 – The International Election Observation Mission for the 2-3 January 2000 election to the House of Representatives of the State Parliament of the Republic of Croatia issued a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions (attached). The International Election Observation Mission is a joint effort of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

The election to the House of Representatives marked progress towards meeting Croatia's commitments as a participating State of the OSCE and as a member of the Council of Europe. The election took place within a new legislative framework that remedied some concerns expressed by the international community after previous elections in Croatia. The Constitutional Court further improved the electoral environment through important decisions and the prompt disposition of complaints. A plurality of political parties were able to compete more effectively for seats in the House of Representatives. And the 76.7% turnout on polling day was an indication of increased voter confidence in the electoral process.

However, important concerns that fundamentally impede Croatia's democratic development remain. The newly elected House of Representatives must address these concerns as a matter of priority:

- A provision of the Law on Citizenship granting ethnic Croats born abroad and having no permanent residence in Croatia the right to Croatian citizenship and the right to vote.
- A large number of citizens of Croatia, mostly members of the Serb minority, who left the country during the war, remain effectively unable to assert their citizenship and therefore exercise their right to vote.
- A provision of the election law granting national minorities the right to special seats in the House of Representatives has been used to justify the creation of separate ethnic voter registers, with the ethnicity of individuals identified, that raise a risk of discrimination and intimidation. These separate ethnic voter registers must be eliminated.

As during previous elections, though somewhat improved, the State media remained excessively biased in favor of the ruling party. Other important concerns relate to the effective participation of political parties in the work of election commissions, the accuracy and transparency of voter registers, campaign financing provisions, and certain provisions of the election law that remained vague. Some of these shortcomings may be addressed through instructions issued by the State Election Commission in time for the forthcoming presidential election.

On election day, for the first time in Croatia, non-partisan domestic observers were able to monitor the event, a significant improvement. Polling and vote count procedures were conducted generally in a calm and orderly manner, and voters were able to express their political will freely. However, some irregularities were observed, including lack of privacy for voters, and complex procedures that should be remedied for the presidential poll. The polling in Bosnia and Herzegovina was marred by an excessive number of voters in some polling stations and irregularities, raising concerns about the integrity of the process there.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe will monitor the follow-up to the above recommendations, and stand ready to continue the dialogue with the Parliament, the Government and other authorities of Croatia with a view to addressing these concerns.

Ms. Helle Degn, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office's Special Representative for the election in Croatia and President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, leads the OSCE Election Observation Mission. Mr. Nikolai Vulchanov heads the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission. Mr. Daniel Goulet leads the Parliamentary Assembly delegation of the Council of Europe.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission was established on 19 November 1999 in Zagreb, covering the ten in-country constituencies throughout Croatia. Their findings include the pre-election preparations and the election campaign. The European Institute for the Media undertook a long-term media monitoring, with financial support from the European Commission. On election day, the IEOM deployed more than 350 short-term observers, including 25 parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and nine from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Observers visited more than 1,200 polling stations out of the 6,500 across Croatia and all 29 polling stations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission will remain in Croatia to observe the presidential election scheduled for 24 January.

A complete text of the preliminary statement is attached.

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