



Although parliamentary elections in Hungary offered voters a diverse choice, ruling party enjoyed undue advantage, say international observers

BUDAPEST, 7 April 2014 – The 6 April 2014 parliamentary elections were well administered and offered voters a diverse choice, but a number of factors provided undue advantage to the ruling party, international observers said in a statement issued today. These included the manner in which a large number of changes to the legal framework were passed, restrictive campaign regulations, biased media coverage and the blurring of the separation between a ruling political party and the state.

“Hungarian voters were offered a genuine choice yesterday in competitive elections. Overall, the process was transparently and efficiently administered,” said Adão Silva, the Special Co-ordinator who led the short-term OSCE observer mission. “Nonetheless, the ruling party still enjoyed an undue advantage, including in biased media coverage.”

Some of the legal changes introduced in the electoral legal framework are welcome, although the procedures for passing these circumvented requirements for public consultation and debate, thus undermining support for and confidence in the reform process, the observers said. The reduction of the seats in parliament from 386 to 199 enjoyed broad support, but there was criticism that the manner in which new electoral district boundaries were drawn lacked transparency and inclusiveness, along with allegations of gerrymandering.

The election administration functioned efficiently. While the work of lower-level commissions enjoyed public confidence, in the current political context the process for appointing the members of the permanent National Election Commission resulted in a partisan composition, the statement said.

“Voting took place in a calm and positive atmosphere,” said Baroness Jenny Hilton, the head of the OSCE PA delegation. “Unfortunately, minorities, including the large Roma population, were largely invisible during yesterday’s election.”

The candidate registration process was inclusive, with 18 party and joint party lists registered for the nationwide proportional system and 1,531 candidates registered for the contests in the 106 single-member constituencies.

Formal media diversity is provided by numerous electronic and print media outlets, but increasing ownership of outlets by those directly or indirectly associated with Fidesz, as well as the allocation of state advertising to certain outlets, undermined media pluralism. New regulations led to the absence of political advertising on nationwide commercial television and media coverage of the campaign on television channels monitored was biased in favour of a ruling party. Combined with a significant amount of government advertising, this undermined equal media access for contestants.

The introduction of new campaign finance legislation was a step forward, but certain areas remain unregulated, including that of third-party campaigning, they said. Other issues, including a lack of monitoring of contestants' financial activities during the campaign, limited the transparency and accountability of the process.

“The legal overhaul, with some 800 new laws or substantial changes introduced, is unprecedented,” said Ambassador Audrey Glover, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission. “Some of the changes were positive, but others undermined checks and balances and there was little or no public consultation or debate. This undermined support for and confidence in the whole process.”

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