



## **Reforms necessary for holding democratic elections in Kazakhstan have yet to materialize, observers say**

ASTANA, 4 April 2011 – Yesterday’s presidential vote in Kazakhstan revealed similar shortcomings as those noted in previous elections in the country, international observers said in a statement issued today. They noted that reforms necessary for holding genuine democratic elections have yet to materialize.

While the election was technically well administered, the absence of opposition candidates and of a vibrant political discourse resulted in a non-competitive environment. A limited field of candidates did not seek to challenge the incumbent.

“While Kazakhstan has achieved a lot since independence, this election has showed that the country still needs to make improvements to meet democratic commitments, particularly in the fields of freedom of assembly and media,” said Special Co-ordinator Tonino Picula who leads the short-term OSCE observer mission and heads the delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. “Despite this election showing a lack of expected progress, we hope the country will use it as a learning experience to improve future elections and ensure genuine competition.”

“Regrettably we have to conclude that this election could and should have been better. It showed the urgency of implementing the long-awaited reforms ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections,” said Ambassador Daan Everts, Head of the long-term election observation mission deployed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Compared to the last presidential election, the media provided more equality in covering candidates in the news programmes, but outside the news there was virtually no analytical election-related coverage, diminishing the ability of voters to make a fully informed choice.

Election day was generally calm, but observers noted serious irregularities, including numerous instances of seemingly identical signatures on voter lists and several cases of ballot box stuffing. The vote count and tabulation lacked transparency, and procedures were often not followed. International observers were sometimes restricted in their observation. The election administration did not publish results broken down by polling station on election night. Many local authorities intervened in the election process in order to increase turnout.

Despite efforts by the authorities to improve the election legislation, there remain shortcomings inconsistent with OSCE commitments. The candidate registration process was marked by lack of transparency and clear rules for verifying supporting signatures and evaluating the mandatory Kazakh language test.

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