



## **Elections in Kyrgyzstan were competitive and offered voters a wide range of choice, while highlighting need for improved procedures and transparency, international observers say**

BISHKEK, 5 October 2015 – The parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan were competitive and provided voters with a wide range of choice, while the manner in which they were administered highlighted the need for better procedures and increased transparency, the international observers concluded in a preliminary statement released today.

While the use of new voting technologies, signaling the political will to improve elections, was successful in many respects, the hurried introduction of biometric registration resulted in significant problems in the inclusiveness of the voter list. This, concerns over ballot secrecy and significant procedural problems during the vote count were the main issues that tarnished what was a generally smooth election day, the observers said.

“These lively and competitive elections were unique in this region as, until 8 o’clock last night, nobody knew what the composition of the parliament would be,” said Ignacio Sánchez Amor, Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “Impressive efforts were made to implement biometric registration and new voting technologies, but procedural shortcomings point to the need for further work.”

Yesterday’s parliamentary elections were keenly contested, with the main parties in particular mounting highly visible campaigns throughout the country and for the entire campaign period, the observers said. The President was highly visible during the campaign, and one political party used his prestige to its benefit. The misuse of state resources in the favour of particular parties, a concern in the past, was not raised as a major issue in these elections, the statement says.

“Yesterday, voting was transparent, and voters made their choice freely among a large number of contestants,” said Meritxell Mateu Pi, Head of the PACE Delegation. “Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan needs to improve its electoral legal framework and more particularly its implementation to guaranty constitutional rights of all citizens to participate in elections. Moreover, transparency of electoral campaigns and political parties’ funding should be reinforced.”

The voter list was based on a unified, nationwide population register, and these elections were the first in which biometric data were used for voter identification, with the stated aim of limiting electoral malfeasance and increasing voter trust. Despite efforts to ensure that all citizens were included in the population register, some did not submit biometric data, including due to concerns over data protection. While there was a public information campaign to familiarize voters with the new voter registration system, the information provided was insufficient, the observers said.

Central Election Commission (CEC) sessions were open to party representatives, the media, and citizen and international observers, but the holding of informal “working meetings”, as a lack of complete, up-to-date information on its website reduced the transparency of its work, the statement says. The CEC’s decisions and resolutions were not always firmly based in law, and directly contradicted the law at times. There was a general level of trust in the work and impartiality of commissions at the regional and precinct levels.

“The embrace of live debates, enabling voters to clearly compare their candidates, was a welcome addition to what became a vibrant campaign,” said Ivana Dobešová, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. “The expectation that politicians should be held accountable in front of television audiences is, for this region, a rare but healthy practice.”

The media provided contestants with the opportunity to present their views through debates and political advertisements, but coverage in news and current affairs programmes consisted largely of paid-for reports. The limited news coverage of the campaign in most outlets, as well as a lack of analytical reporting, reduced the

amount of impartial information available to voters, the statement says. The lack of editorial coverage of contestants' campaigns and platforms was in contrast to extensive positive coverage of the President and other state officials in all state-financed media.

“The EU and the European Parliament will continue to support Kyrgyzstan, and stand ready to offer strong support to the country in the improvement of its electoral system,” said Ryszard Czarnecki, Head of the EP delegation. “This will be part of our economic assistance for further democratic development.”

Candidate registration was inclusive, as the CEC registered the lists of all 14 political parties that submitted the required documents and paid the electoral deposit. Quotas to ensure representation on party lists for women, minorities, youth and those with disabilities were respected at the time of registration, but the effectiveness of the quotas is undermined by the lack of provisions to maintain them after registration, the observers said.

These elections were the first held under the 2011 election law, amended earlier this year, and while the electoral framework generally provides an adequate basis for holding democratic elections, inconsistencies remain, and greater clarity could provide better guidance and ensure uniform application of the law, the statement says. The election law regulates campaign financing and sets contribution and expenditure limits, but greater transparency, including through regular publication of detailed reports that parties must submit to the CEC prior to and after election day, would be of benefit.

“The election administration took extensive steps to try to streamline the voting process. Nevertheless, better procedures and increased transparency are essential for progress to take root,” said Ambassador Boris Frlec, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term election observation mission. “This will also depend on the harmonization of electoral legislation, including fundamental points such as the right for independent candidates to stand and the removal of the dual threshold. ODIHR stands ready to assist the Kyrgyz authorities in this regard.”

Civil society was actively involved in observing the elections. However, the CEC only began accrediting foreign observers 30 days before election day, thus limiting their ability to observe all stages of the electoral process, the observers said.

Election day was peaceful and, while the voting process was assessed positively in 95 per cent of the polling stations observed, in a significant number of stations not all voters could be found on voter lists. The biometric identification equipment and ballot scanners generally worked well, although occasional technical problems led to regular temporary interruptions of the process, the statement says. The vote count was assessed negatively in more than one third of polling stations observed, which is a concern, and the tabulation process was also assessed negatively at many of the territorial election commissions observed.

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