



ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

PRESS RELEASE

Montenegrin elections largely in line with international standards but challenges remain, international observers say

PODGORICA, 11 September 2006 - Yesterday's parliamentary elections in Montenegro were held largely in line with OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards for democratic elections, but several reappearing challenges remain to be addressed, the International Election Observation Mission announced today.

"The people of the world's newest country can be proud that their first elections since gaining independence meet international electoral standards. We look forward to working with our Montenegrin parliamentary colleagues and overcoming remaining challenges", said Joao Soares, Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Delegation and Special Co-ordinator for the short-term observers.

Jean-Charles Gardetto, Head of Delegation of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, said: "These elections confirmed Montenegro's commitment to democracy and the principles of the Council of Europe, which Montenegro hopes to join in the very near future. However, stable election law is a key aspect of a democratic process. The recent changes to the law, after the elections were called, are therefore regrettable."

Jorgen Grunnet, who heads the long-term mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, reiterated the need to address remaining and re-emerging challenges to an overall well-administered election.

"This is simply a question of getting rid of bad habits", he said.

The campaign was for the most part calm, orderly and low-key, but the campaign climate deteriorated during the last days. Opposition candidates complained of undue pressure on voters and candidates. Allegations of vote buying, one of which was substantiated, tainted the campaign environment. A diverse media covered the campaign thoroughly, but broadcasters, including public television, concentrated their coverage on the ruling parties.

The legal framework provides an adequate basis for the conduct of elections, but contrary to international standards and practice, the Election Law was amended after the elections were called. Some of the amendments included limitations on freedom of speech and expression. Furthermore, the mandate allocation is not fully transparent, as it only requires parties to allocate half of the seats according to the order of candidates on the electoral list.

Some 200 observers from 41 countries monitored the vote and the count. Election day was assessed positively in 98 per cent of polling stations visited. Counting was assessed less positively, with eight per cent characterized negatively, mainly due to procedural irregularities, indicating that further training of polling board members is needed.

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