



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



**INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
RUSSIAN FEDERATION
ELECTION OF DEPUTIES TO THE STATE DUMA (PARLIAMENT)
19 December 1999**

PRESS RELEASE

Moscow, 20 December 1999 – The International Election Observation Mission for the 19 December 1999 election of Deputies to the State Duma of the Russian Federation issues a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions (attached). The Mission is a joint effort of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, and the European Parliament.

The State Duma election marked significant progress for the consolidation of democracy in the Russian Federation. This election, the third since the end of single party rule, has taken place under an amended election law that has improved with each poll. The law is consistent with internationally recognized democratic principles. The law provides the framework for parties and blocs to enter the political arena on an equal basis, and ensures a level playing field for all candidates. Indeed, this election was competitive and pluralistic. Moreover, the law provides for a significantly increased level of transparency in all phases of the electoral process. The Central Election Commission endeavored to implement fully the electoral legislation.

The Chechnya conflict was not a contentious issue in this campaign, although it provided the political backdrop for the election and affected the outcome. Public support for the military action insulated the Government from criticism on significant domestic issues.

While the media in the Russian Federation is pluralistic and diverse, most important segments of the media failed to provide impartial and fair information about the political choices on offer to the electorate. Commercial media conglomerates have absorbed much of the independent media and have become major stockholders in the state-controlled media. The pre-election period was marked by a campaign in which candidates and the media waged negative attacks on their opponents, often crossing the line to slander and libel. Penalties levied against offenders have been insufficient to deter repeat violations. In addition, campaign expenditure often appeared to exceed legal limits and should be controlled more effectively.

Similar problems sometimes occur in other democracies. However, many problems are specific to Russia's transition and must be addressed in particular. Observers noted interference by executive authorities in the election process, for instance: failure to allow opposition parties and candidates to arrange public meetings; dismissal from employment; initiation of extraordinary tax inspections, administrative fines, and criminal investigations that were subsequently proven groundless.

Notwithstanding these deficiencies, the high voter turnout in this election indicates confidence in the democratic process. The large number of domestic observers on election day undoubtedly increased this level of confidence. On election day, irregularities noted by observers were mostly due to inadequate polling facilities. Otherwise, election commissions managed the proceedings well. In the end, the vigorous competition during this election contributed to a generally positive assessment by international observers, despite the shortcomings detailed in the preliminary statement. These shortcomings must be addressed in future reforms. The final reports of institutions subscribing to this statement will include recommendations for such reforms.

Ms. Helle Degn, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office for the State Duma election and President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, leads the OSCE Election Observation Mission. Ambassador Edouard Brunner leads the OSCE/ODIHR long-term Election Observation Mission. Mr. Ernst Muehleemann leads the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly delegation. Ms. Constanze Krehl leads the European Parliament ad hoc delegation for observation of the State Duma elections.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission was established on 5 November 1999 in Moscow and 11 regions throughout the Russian Federation. Their findings include the pre-election preparations, the election campaign, and the media. On election day, the International Election Observation Mission deployed more than 400 short-term observers, including more than 130 parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, and the European Parliament, who visited some 4,000 polling stations across the country.

For further information, please contact:

- Mr. David Lowe of the European Parliament ad hoc Delegation for the Observation of the State Duma Elections, in Moscow (+7.095.967.5915) or in Brussels (+32.2.284.2396);
- Mr. Egbert Aulsebrook of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, in Strasbourg (+33.3.88.41.30.77);
- Mr. Jan Jooren, Press Counselor of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, in Moscow (+7.095.929.8520) or mobile (45.21.60.63.80);
- Ms. Helene Lloyd, Media Officer, ODIHR Election Observation Mission, in Moscow (+7.095.937.8253) until 23 December; or Mr. Rainer Hermann, ODIHR Election Advisor, in Warsaw (+48.22.520.0600).