



**INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
RUSSIAN FEDERATION - PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
26 March 2000**

PRESS RELEASE

Moscow, 27 March 2000 – The 26 March 2000 election of the President marks further progress for the consolidation of democratic elections in the Russian Federation, concludes the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM).

The Central Election Commission (CEC) administered the process professionally and independently. The election took place under a new law that is consistent with internationally recognized democratic principles. The law provides the framework for pluralist elections and for a significantly high level of transparency in all phases of the electoral process. However, during the campaign some concerns emerged.

The IEOM 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 (PA), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Ms. Helle Degn, President of the OSCE/PA and OSCE Chairperson-in-Office's Special Representative for the presidential election, leads the OSCE Election Observation Mission. Ambassador Edouard Brunner leads the OSCE/ODIHR long-term observers. Mr. Björn von der Esch leads the PACE delegation.

On election day, 11 candidates were on the ballot. However, the popularity of the acting President and the results during the 1999 State Duma election limited the field of candidates. Notwithstanding the CEC effort to enforce the law vigorously, candidates, campaign organizations and supporters circumvented the law in some cases. Additionally, volunteer campaign activities of State and regional administration officials on leave of absence raise concerns.

While the media in the Russian Federation remain pluralistic and diverse, independent media have come under increasing pressure. Moreover, as during the State Duma election, important segments of the media, both State-controlled and private, failed to provide impartial information about the election campaign and candidates.

The CEC decided to conduct the presidential elections in 12 of Chechnya's 15 districts and prepared all technical requirements. However, standard conditions for elections do not exist there. In particular, election campaign activities did not take place, the population had limited access to the media, they had limited freedom of movement, and the potential for intimidation and fear could not be ruled out. On election day, the IEOM did not observe the proceedings in Chechnya or the neighboring regions, though the CEC invited observers.

On election day, the 69% reported turnout was a confirmation of continued voter confidence in the electoral process. The polling in over 93,000 precincts was administered in accordance with the law. Observers rated their performance very high across the country. The performance of commissions during the counting of votes was rated lower as cumbersome procedural requirements were circumvented in order to expedite the process. The irregularities noted in the polling and the vote count did not appear to have an impact on the outcome of the election.

With less than a decade of democratic development in the Russian Federation, political parties and an environment for constructive political debate have yet to mature. Viewed in this context, the 26 March 2000 presidential election, while in general meeting the country's commitments as an OSCE participating State and as a member of the Council of Europe, revealed some weaknesses. Chief among these are pressure on the media and the decline of credible pluralism.

The International Election Observation Mission wishes to express appreciation to the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Duma, and the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the observation.

This press release is also available in Russian. However, the English text remains the only official version.

The International Election Observation Mission issued a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions (attached) before the final certification of the election results and before a complete analysis of the IEOM's findings.

The preliminary statement is based on the findings of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission established on 8 February 2000 in Moscow and 12 regions throughout the Russian Federation. Their findings include the pre-election preparations, the election campaign, and the media. The statement is also based on the election-day findings of the International Election Observation Mission's more than 380 short-term observers from 32 participating States, including more than 75 parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, who visited some 1,700 polling stations across the country.

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