



Despite lack of level playing field in Russian elections, voters took advantage of right to express choice, observers say

MOSCOW, 5 December 2011 – Despite the lack of a level playing field during the Russian State Duma elections, voters took advantage of their right to express their choice, the international observers concluded in a statement issued today (attached).

The observers noted that the preparations for the elections were technically well-administered across a vast territory, but were marked by a convergence of the state and the governing party, limited political competition and a lack of fairness.

Although seven political parties ran, the prior denial of registration to certain parties had narrowed political competition. The contest was also slanted in favour of the ruling party: the election administration lacked independence, most media were partial and state authorities interfered unduly at different levels. The observers also noted that the legal framework had been improved in some respects and televised debates for all parties provided one level platform for contestants.

On election day, voting was well organized overall, but the quality of the process deteriorated considerably during the count, which was characterized by frequent procedural violations and instances of apparent manipulations, including serious indications of ballot box stuffing.

“Yesterday’s elections proved that the Russian people can form the future of this country by expressing their will despite many obstacles. However, changes are needed for the will of the people to be respected. I particularly noticed the interference of the state in all levels of political life, the lack of necessary conditions for a fair competition and no independence of the media. I honour the effort of the Russian people to shape their democratic future in line with our common commitments,” said Petros Efthymiou, the Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission and Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation.

“This result shows that voting can make a real difference in Russia, even when the playing field is slanted in favour of one party. However, any election needs an impartial referee – and until now, it has not had one. This needs to change. Yesterday, Russia showed that it is technically able to organize fair elections – now it is up to the parties to use this opening for real politics and make it a reality,” said Tiny Kox, Head of the delegation of the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly.

“These elections were like a game in which only some players are allowed on the pitch, and then the field is tilted in favour of one of the players. Although the choice was limited and the competition lacked fairness, voters were able to come out and have their voices heard,” said Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, the Head of the Election Observation Mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

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