

PRESS RELEASE

Despite certain positive steps, Tajikistan's parliamentary elections failed to meet many key OSCE commitments

DUSHANBE, 1 March 2010 – Yesterday's parliamentary elections took place peacefully, but despite certain small positive steps failed to meet many key OSCE commitments, the international election observation mission concluded in a preliminary statement issued today.

The observers noted that higher-level election commissions were more inclusive than in previous elections. But they also highlighted serious irregularities on election day, including a high prevalence of family and proxy voting and cases of ballot box stuffing.

The election law included significant shortcomings such as insufficient guarantees for an inclusive and pluralistic composition of election commissions and lack of safeguards relating to voter registration, campaigning and election day procedures.

Despite efforts to promote public awareness, the election campaign had a low profile. Some parties and candidates provided voters with political alternatives. Instances of violations or inconsistent application of campaign regulations hindered the establishment of a level playing field. While the pre-election media environment appeared to have been less controlled, state television news coverage of campaign activities was almost completely absent, limiting voters' ability to make an informed choice.

"I'm happy that election day took place in a generally good atmosphere, but I'm even more disappointed that these elections failed on many basic democratic standards. Such serious irregularities weaken genuine democratic progress. There is still a long way to go, and hopefully the new parliament will take up this challenge," said Pia Christmas-Møller, Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE short-term observers and Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

"Through our presence in the country and this joint assessment of the election, we want to underline the importance of further developing the European Parliament's co-operation with the newly elected Tajik parliament," said Elisabeth Jeggle, Head of the European Parliament delegation.

"This election saw a certain level of pluralism, but unfortunately the stated will of the authorities to follow democratic procedures did not translate into concrete measures to address the significant shortcomings that marred the campaign environment and election day," said Artis Pabriks, Head of the long-term election observation mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

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For further information, please contact Mr. Klas Bergman, OSCE PA Director of Communications, klas@oscepa.dk, +45 60108380