

Repeat second round of election brings Ukraine substantially closer to meeting international standards

KYIV, 27 December 2004 - The repeat second round of the presidential election in Ukraine on 26 December brought Ukraine substantially closer to meeting international standards. Throughout the election an engaged civil society demonstrated an active interest in the democratic process, concluded the International Election Observation Mission in a preliminary statement released today in Kyiv. The mission deployed a record number of 1,370 observers from 44 countries for the election.

In its conclusions, the mission noted that campaign conditions were markedly more equal, observers received fewer reports of pressure on voters, the election administration was more transparent and the media more balanced than in the previous rounds.

"I cannot express to you how delighted I am to say that in our collective view Ukraine's elections have moved substantially closer to meeting OSCE and other European standards in such a short period of time," said Bruce George, President emeritus of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Special Co-ordinator for the short-term observers. "In our judgment the people of this great country can be truly proud that yesterday they took a great step towards free and democratic elections, by electing the next president of Ukraine."

The Head of the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Tadeusz Iwinski, said: "The Council of Europe did not have a candidate in this election. We respect the choice the people of Ukraine have made and the expression of that choice was clear and democratic. Without prejudging the outcome of the official count, I am pleased to announce today that the Bureau of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly is extending an invitation to the new president of Ukraine to address its plenary session in late January."

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Head of the European Parliament delegation added: "Ultimately it was the Ukrainian citizens that deserve most credit, due to their refusal to accept the authorities' attempt to deny them the right to freely elect their president."

"Our Mission's findings contrast sharply with those from previous rounds, and they show that the Ukrainian people are committed to democratic principles and practices," said Karl Lamers, Deputy head of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation.

Ambassador Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR's long-term observation mission, stressed the need to build on the progress that has been made. "Building blocks have been put in place for any future democratic elections in this country. There has been great improvement in the work of the election administration, in particular, the Central Election Commission. We hope that further improvements will follow, regarding, for instance, non-partisan domestic observers and the voter lists."

Positive elements of the pre-election campaign period included fewer examples of abuse of state resources, freedom of association was respected, media coverage was significantly more balanced, editorial instructions (temnyky) issued to journalists disappeared and there were far fewer reports of people dependent on the State for their livelihood being pressured in their choice of candidate.

However, some shortcomings remained, such as poorly prepared voter lists, inflammatory campaign material and the failure to incorporate provisions in the newly amended electoral legislation clarifying the role of the police on election day, requiring the Central Election Commission to publish all polling station results promptly and permitting non-partisan election observation.

On election day, a vast majority of observers assessed the process much more favourably than in the two previous rounds. On the whole, polling was conducted in a calm atmosphere.

There was insufficient time to correct errors in voter lists and once again some citizens were turned away from polling stations because their names did not appear on the lists. Relatively few voters had their names added to voter lists on election day.

Observers noted some confusion in the handling of voting by homebound voters. However, ad hoc solutions to the problem were also observed, for instance in providing transportation for elderly and immobile voters to polling stations.

The Central Election Commission announced preliminary results by polling stations for the first time. The speed with which election results were announced and the transparency of the announcement stand in marked contrast to the previous two rounds and serves to reassure voters and candidates of the accuracy of the election results.

The IEOM included 1,370 observers from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. A final report will be released approximately six weeks after the completion of the electoral process.