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Parliamentary Elections in Belarus

A delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly monitored the elections in the Republic of Belarus on 14 May 1995 at the invitation of the Foreign Ministry and Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus. The Delegation, which was led by Dr. Willi Fuhrmann, Member of the Austrian Parliament, included 10 parliamentarians from 6 countries: Dr. Willi Fuhrmann of Austria; Vaclav Cundrle, Jan Decker, Jaromir Kalus and Tomas Sterba of the Czech Republic; Maria Kaisa Aula of Finland; Zourab Shengelia of Georgia; Aud Gaundal and Erik Solheim of Norway; and Ionel Roman of Romania. Inviting international monitors to observe elections is an important step in opening up the electoral process.

During the visit to Belarus the delegation met with representatives of the government, the outgoing parliament, major political parties, the Constitutional Court, the Central Electoral Commission, and the mass media.

On election day, members of the delegation visited many regions of Belarus, the city of Minsk, numerous other cities and towns, rural areas, and some 70 polling stations, including their opening and closings.

The delegation congratulates the Republic of Belarus for holding its first multi-party elections and recognizes this effort as an important and vital step towards democratic development. The delegation also strongly encourages the citizenry of Belarus to participate in the second round of voting that will probably be necessary to seat the new parliament. It is essential for the future of Belarus that the republic has a legislature. There can be no legitimate excuse in Belarus for delaying or not seating a parliament in subsequent run-off elections.

A lack of democratic traditions in Belarus may have caused difficulties in the electoral process. However, they were not determined by the delegation to be the cause for many of the problems.

Based on its findings the delegation considers that these elections did not meet all international standards for free and fair

elections. This assessment was based upon a number of criteria, in particular:

1) There appears to be an imbalance concerning the executive and legislative branches of government in regard to some aspects of the electoral process. It appeared the executive branch had an inappropriate involvement in some aspects of the electoral process.

2) The interpretation of the election law regarding the principle on equal opportunities, including access to the media and campaign funding, resulted in insufficient information on parties, candidates and their platforms. The lack of information, to a large extent due to restrictions on the media, appeared to be one of the main difficulties for electorate in exercising its right to vote.

3) The government's interpretation of the "majoritarian" concept severely inhibited political party activity during the campaign.

4) Numerous complaints were lodged from the state and independent media regarding the firing of editors for covering campaign/party issues, biased coverage of opposition parties and candidates, state publishing houses denying access to presses for some publications.

5) The executive branch interfered in the electoral process through the distribution of biased information concerning the referendum and some parties. Such biased, official information was present at many polling stations.

The delegation also observed other irregularities such as many voters collecting, marking and depositing multiple sets of ballots for both parliamentary and referendum questions. Although this was deemed not intentional on the part of authorities, it belied the fact that an insufficient effort was made to educate voters on correct procedures.

The delegation wishes to emphasize that in spite of these irregularities the republic's future democratic development would be further disrupted by any inability to seat a parliament through run-off elections. Therefore, the delegation strongly urges the electorate to participate in the run-off elections.

The Delegation will shortly issue a detailed report, and then present its findings to the Standing Committee of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at its meeting on 4 July 1995 in Ottawa, Canada. Further information may be obtained from Mr. Pentti Vaananen, Deputy Secretary General, or Mr. Eric Rudenshiold, Program Director of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly: Raadhustraede 1, 1466-Copenhagen K, Tel +45 3332 9400, Fax +45 3332 5505