

Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina generally in line with international standards, but key aspects need action

SARAJEVO, 4 October 2010 – Yesterday's general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina represented further progress and, except for legal restrictions of voting rights, were conducted generally in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments, international observers concluded in a preliminary statement issued today. They stressed that certain key areas require action.

"We have seen yet another demonstration that the electoral process in Bosnia and Herzegovina has stabilized, which is a further promising step towards full integration into the European structures. I congratulate the people of the country and also the election administration for the conduct of these elections. I hope we will soon see the new parliament address the remaining issues," said Special Co-ordinator Roberto Battelli who leads the short-term OSCE observer mission and heads the OSCE PA delegation.

"Our delegation is impressed with the peaceful and relaxed atmosphere surrounding these elections, and it pays tribute to the thousands of electoral administrators whose professionalism and commitment made the voting process a success. However, the elections were once again conducted with ethnicity and residence-based limitations to active and passive suffrage rights imposed by the Dayton Accords. As such, the extant legal framework continues to violate Protocol no. 12 of the European Convention of Human Rights," said Tiny Kox, Head of the delegation of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.

"These elections consolidated the progress achieved by Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2006. We were impressed with the overwhelmingly orderly process conducted in polling stations across the country on election day. Shortcomings remain, particularly with regard to procedural problems. Still, the people of this country won these elections. They have demonstrated their strong commitment to democracy," said Wladyslaw Sidorowicz, Head of the delegation of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

"Given the complexity of the electoral system, election officials have done a commendable job in organizing the process in a professional and efficient manner. Removing existing limitations to voting rights would not only bring the legal framework fully in line with international standards, but also make the process more manageable for election officials and more understandable to voters," said Daan Everts, Head of the election observation mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Voters could choose from a broad range of candidates representing a wide political spectrum at state and entity level.

Election day was orderly and calm. Voting was assessed positively, but observers noted instances of family voting in one out of four polling stations visited. The counting process was assessed less positively, with numerous procedural irregularities observed. The unusually high percentage of invalid ballots is a matter of concern.

The election commissions at the central and municipal level enjoyed general confidence among electoral stakeholders. The appointment process of polling station committees, however, was tainted by the practice of contestants nominating committee members affiliated with another party or candidate, or contestants trading seats.

The election campaign was generally calm, although occasionally marked by nationalist rhetoric and inflammatory statements. The variety of views presented in the media provided voters with the opportunity to make informed choices, although populist rhetoric often detracted from issues of substance. While contestants addressed economic, social and European integration topics, constitutional issues and underlying ethnic divisions remained omnipresent.

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