

**Election Observation Mission  
National Assembly Elections  
in Republika Srpska  
22-23 November 1997**

**Preliminary Report issued 24 November 1997 by the  
Special Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office,  
Mr. Javier Rupérez**

Following the decision of President Plavsic to dissolve the National Assembly of Republika Srpska on 3 July 1997 and the Agreements reached by all involved parties to carry out the new elections for the Assembly, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina took up the role of organising the elections under the same arrangements as for the recent Municipal Elections.

The 150 international observers visited more than 80% of the polling stations in Republika Srpska.

The following is only a preliminary statement. No final assessments can be drawn until the vote count and verification procedure has been completed, and the results of the election fully implemented.

**Conclusions**

**The Observation Mission has concluded that the RS National Assembly election was well administered and a technically correct process. However, it has also concluded that a technically correct process has been grafted onto a political environment which falls far short of democratic standards. While recognising that this election is part of an ongoing conflict resolution process, this process can only be effective if the political parties take serious steps in the implementation of all aspects of the Dayton Agreement.**

**This election does represent a further step forward. The electorate met their civic responsibility by participating in the election process and expressing their political preferences in a peaceful manner. However, the elected institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are still not meeting their responsibility to the electorate and are not functioning in an effective manner. The bodies at national level are failing to pass laws and make decisions that are absolutely crucial to the development of an independent state.**

**It should also be stressed that the success of the elections is dependent upon the full loyalty of all parties to the results, and that the National Assembly will meet and conduct its duties effectively. Regardless of how the distribution of seats will be, the**

**obligation of all parties to actively contribute to the peace agreement implementation process should be underlined.**

**The Presidential, Parliamentary, Cantonal and Municipal elections that have taken place in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the last two years could not have been realised without the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The thorough involvement of the OSCE will also be crucial for the upcoming 1998 elections. Nevertheless, during the 1998 election process, the local election authorities should become more engaged in order to prepare for a smooth transfer of a Provisional Election Commission to a Permanent one.**

### **Political Environment**

The Election Observation Mission is concerned that, despite the dedicated efforts of the OSCE and the international community at large, the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement is unacceptably slow. The present situation does not permit an election process to be carried out in a democratic environment. The basic standards for a democratic society, such as freedom of movement, return of refugees to areas where they constitute an ethnic minority, freedom and independence of media, remain absent. The fact that indicted war criminals are still at large and exercising strong influence on political life seriously undermines the democratic process. A clear manifestation of this problem were the campaign posters picturing Radovan Karadzic .

In the weeks leading up to the elections there have been instances of politically motivated violence, the attack on the SNS headquarters in Bijelina being one of the most recent and serious ones. Fortunately, the atmosphere the last days before the election and the election days themselves were peaceful.

### **Pre-Election Period**

#### ***Voter and Candidate Registration***

Given the short time-frame from the announcement of the elections to the election day, it would not have been feasible to further update the voter register. It was important to maintain the principles behind the current register, which encourage voters to cast their ballot in their pre-war municipality, for this particular election.

Nevertheless, before new elections are held, a comprehensive citizen's register should be established.

The registration of parties, coalitions and independent candidates was conducted under time pressure. Even though the scrutiny of signatures of the registrants was done on a sample basis, this process treated all candidates equally. There was less time for an appeals process than is ideal.

#### ***Media***

The media situation was problematic in that no agreement was reached which would have allowed for SRT in Pale to resume broadcasting. However, the SRT programmes from Banja Luka gave every party and candidate a chance to present their platforms and the commentaries

were generally less biased than during previous elections. Still, the respective leading parties and figures were given more prominent coverage than other political forces, and more than what should be normal coverage in similar situations. In the main news of SRT Banja Luka, Mrs Plavsic received 45% of the coverage and in the evening news even 53%. In BHT the Coalition and their main political figures took 44% of the time in its news programme.

It is unfortunate that the HTV in Mostar has not broadcast their news programmes since 8/11/97 following the Editor's resignation.

### ***Campaign Financing***

The Election Observation Mission is concerned by the lack of transparency in the funding provided by the OSCE Mission to the parties, coalitions and independent candidates. Not making the fund distribution public could create suspicion among the parties and the public at large.

### **Election Days**

The elections days were generally carried out in a competent, peaceful and orderly manner. However, observers did report that there was some confusion in the polling stations concerning the tendered ballot process. The procedures for voters that were not included in the voter register but were offered the chance to vote according to the tendered ballot provision were not consistently applied. The confusion stemmed from the late communication of changes to the process. Any future amendments to any aspect of the polling procedures should be made in sufficient time to permit the clear and consistent communication of the revised procedures to the polling station level.

Observers also reported that, contrary to the election regulations, there was a frequent occurrence of more than one person in the polling booth at the same time. While this problem is mainly due to family members wishing to vote together, it does compromise the principle of a secret ballot and should not be permitted in the future.

### **Announcement of Election Results**

At the time of submitting this statement all ballots have not been counted and the results are not published.

The Observation Mission stresses the importance of publishing the results as quickly as possible to enhance public confidence of the outcome of the election. At the time when all in-country votes have been tabulated, the preliminary results of the count should be announced.

The Observation Mission re-emphasises its comments from the municipal election that the process of tabulating results should be as transparent as possible, and that detailed results on polling station level aggregated to National Assembly level should be made available to all observers and the public.

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*In accordance with Article III, 2. (e) of Annex 3 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (the Dayton Agreement), the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) continued its observation role and extended the presence of its already*

*established Election Observation Mission for the Municipal Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina to include the observation of the Republika Srpska National Assembly Election.*

*Mr. Javier Rupérez, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, was appointed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office as a Special Representative to the Election Observation Mission.*

*Mr. Kåre Vollan was appointed by the ODIHR as the On-site Co-ordinator in July, upon being seconded by the Government of Norway.*

*This statement is based upon the collective findings of observers seconded by 28 countries, by parliamentarians and public officials representing the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and Congress for Local and Regional Authorities, the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM), local Embassies, as well as a number of NGO's. In total, 130 short term observers and 21 long term observers were deployed throughout the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.*