

PRESS ADVISORY

Election progress in Kazakhstan slowed due to lack of transparency, observers report

ASTANA, 20 September 2004 - The 19 September parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan fell short of OSCE and Council of Europe standards in many respects. Of particular concern were the failure to fully implement improved election legislation and the manner in which electronic voting was introduced, which did not contribute to the confidence of the electorate in the election process, concludes the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) in a statement, issued today. Over 300 international observers from 33 countries monitored the voting and counting on behalf of the OSCE and Council of Europe.

"It is disappointing that the improved election legislation did not result in a more transparent election than we witnessed yesterday," said Ihor Ostash, Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, appointed by the OSCE Chairman in Office as the Special Co-ordinator for the Short-term observers. "However, we did note some improvements from previous elections and we stand ready to continue the work with the election authorities to strengthen both the legislation and the process."

Tana de Zulueta, Head of the Parliamentary Delegation of the Council of Europe, whose Parliamentary Assembly recently signed a co-operation accord with the Parliament of Kazakhstan, added: "The voters had a real choice with 10 parties and blocks registered, including an opposition party that had been refused registration in previous elections. However, the seemingly politically motivated convictions of two prominent opposition leaders and lack of political balance in the composition of election commissions were worrisome, as well as evident media bias in favour of the pro-presidential parties."

Ambassador Robert L. Barry, Head of the Long-term Observation Mission, deployed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, concluded: "Our observers reported confusion and inconsistency on election day. The lack of transparency in the work of the Central Election Commission throughout the process, and last-minute decisions on parallel electronic and paper voting created confusion in many polling stations, during voting and counting. The discrepancy between the number of names on the paper and the electronic voter lists is of concern."

Despite the shortcomings in the election process, the IEOM recognized improvements regarding media and registration. Domestic observers were given more legal rights which provided them with greater access to the process. Seven TV debates, albeit restrictive in format, gave the respective parties opportunities to inform the public of their views. There were no cases of media outlets being shut down or journalists being prosecuted. Official voter education efforts were carried out professionally and effectively.

Election day proceeded calmly, but the closing, counting and tabulation were problematic. Over 50 per cent of observers reported unauthorized persons in polling stations during counting and widespread failure to post result protocols. The accuracy of the voter register was compromised due to voters being added to the list, voters being turned away at the

polling station, and the significant discrepancy between paper and electronic voter lists. Many cases of group voting and of domestic observers being denied full access to polling station procedures, in spite of new legislation which allows them access, were reported.

For further information, representatives of the media are kindly requested to contact OSCE PA Counsellor Jan R.M. Jooren at the International Secretariat in Copenhagen, Tel +45 33 37 80 40, Fax +45 33 37 80 30, e-mail: jan@oscepa.dk, Mobile: + 45 40 41 16 41

The Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, created by the CSCE Summit in Paris in 1990, is the parliamentary dimension of the 55-nation Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The primary task of the 317 member Assembly is to facilitate interparliamentary dialogue, an important aspect of the overall effort to meet the challenges of democracy throughout the OSCE area.