



OSCE ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
KYRGYZ REPUBLIC
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION
20 FEBRUARY 2000

PRESS RELEASE

**OSCE/ODIHR releases preliminary statement on Kyrgyzstan
parliamentary elections**

Bishkek, 21 February 2000 - The 20 February parliamentary elections represented a critical event in the democratic development of the Kyrgyz Republic. Changes to electoral legislation provided the potential for increased competition and party representation and an increased role for civil society in the political process. However, a series of decisions preventing parties and candidates from competing in the election on a fair and equal basis, and a high degree of interference in the electoral process by public prosecutors and some state officials, marred the pre-election period. As a result, the parliamentary elections were not in full compliance with OSCE commitments.

Opposition parties and candidates faced a number of obstacles and registration problems during the campaign. As a consequence of various registration problems and court proceedings faced by some candidates and parties, the level of confidence in the independence and neutrality of the judiciary and election administration was diminished.

The campaign was carried out in a peaceful manner, with a large number of public meetings. However, some candidates were hindered in attempts to hold campaign meetings. There were attempts of vote bribing, and some local officials and university heads abused their positions to influence voters.

The State media showed an overt bias in favour of pro-government parties. The legal provision to provide free airtime on an equal basis was generally met. Whilst some press freedom exists in the Kyrgyz Republic, public and private media remain vulnerable to pressure from the authorities, creating a climate of self-censorship.

On election day, voters participated in an active and peaceful manner. In general across the country, the process was largely carried out according to the law and was well organized. The large presence of domestic observers across the country served to increase confidence and transparency. However, the territorial vote tabulation was not always transparent.

Other positive factors included a pluralistic political spectrum and an active civil society. However, some worrying trends emerged as well, noticeably the lack of full independence of the judiciary, election administration, media, as well as the presence of obstacles to full and equal participation by the country's political forces. The Kyrgyz authorities should address these concerns before a second round and the presidential election later this year.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Election Observation Mission for the 20 February Parliamentary Elections is a joint effort of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). The statement of preliminary findings and conclusions (attached) is issued prior to the completion of the entire electoral process.

MISSION INFORMATION

Mr. Ihor Ostash, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Ukrainian Parliament and a Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, is the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for observation of the 20 February parliamentary elections in the Kyrgyz Republic, and leads the short term observation.

Mr. Mark Stevens (UK) is the Head of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission, which has been present in the country since January 12, with a team of 17 international experts, covering the pre-election period.

The OSCE Election Observation Mission deployed 115 international observers on election day, including a 16-person delegation from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. On election day observers reported from some 600 polling stations in most of the 45 election constituencies.

The OSCE Election Observation Mission would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic for their invitation to observe these elections, and the Central, Territorial and Precinct Election Commissions and political parties for their full co-operation during the course of the observation.

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