

## **Montenegro's elections met almost all international standards, but further democratic development is needed, observers say**

PODGORICA, 30 March 2009 - Yesterday's parliamentary elections in Montenegro met almost all international commitments and standards, but the process again underscored the need for further democratic development, the international election observation mission concluded in a statement issued today.

Overall, the elections were organized professionally, and political parties were able to present their programmes to voters freely. The voting and counting process was evaluated highly positively by the observers, with very few incidents reported.

The observers noted, however, that lack of public confidence remained a key challenge, as frequent allegations of electoral fraud and a blurring of state and party structures created a negative atmosphere among many voters. Other challenges include the need to harmonize and reform the electoral framework, lack of adequate legal redress, and insufficient critical reporting by most broadcast media.

"I have long watched Montenegro's political and economic development, both before and after its independence. In those years, the country has made steady democratic progress and election day yesterday was truly impressive. There is no doubt in my mind that these elections further strengthened Montenegro's democracy", said Roberto Battelli, Head of the delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) and Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE short-term observer mission.

"The organization of the elections was remarkably efficient. But to gain legitimacy and build confidence among the entire electorate, especially among voters supporting those who lost the elections, the winners have to be more inclusive, pluralistic and fair", said Andreas Gross, Head of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

"These elections were very well organized. But democracy also needs high public trust in its institutions. It is therefore important to strengthen confidence in the electoral process, in particular by investigating in a serious way persisting allegations of fraud and implementing long-standing recommendations. This is particularly important in the context of Montenegro's further democratic development and the process of European integration", said Artis Pabriks, Head of the long-term election observation mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).