



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION PRESS RELEASE

Serbia's elections in line with international standards, says international observation mission

BELGRADE, 22 January 2007 - The 21 January parliamentary elections in Serbia provided a genuine opportunity for the citizens of Serbia to choose from a range of political platforms and were in line with OSCE commitments and Council of Europe's standards for democratic elections. Still, a few issues in the election legislation remain to be addressed. Those are the conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), announced in Belgrade today.

"The elections in Serbia were free and fair," said *OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Goran Lennmarker*, Special Co-Ordinator of the OSCE short-term observers. "I was personally impressed and proud on behalf of the Serb people for the professional, orderly and well-organized way they carried out this election. It bodes well for Serbia's future."

Tadeusz Iwinski, the *Head of the Delegation of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly*, said: "The way the parliamentary elections were held in Serbia proves that the country has made significant progress towards ensuring a free expression of the will of the electorate, whose active participation in the vote shows its intense involvement in determining the vector of their country's development. All this is extremely important in light of Serbia's upcoming chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe that starts in May 2007."

Assen Agov, the *Head of the NATO Assembly's Delegation*, added that "members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly were glad to observe elections that were free and fair. It was the first vote after Serbia was invited to join the Partnership for Peace. We share the conclusions of the IEOM and look forward to working with the new Serbian parliament."

Ambassador Geert Ahrens, who heads the long-term election observation mission deployed by the *OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)* in mid-December, said: "The ODIHR sent an experienced and committed team of observers. Their findings address the entire election process, including issues that need future attention but are, on the whole, a compliment to the democratic standards that Serbia has reached."

Six out of twenty political parties and coalitions represented minorities, and for the first time in recent years Albanian minority parties contested national elections.

The international observers also noted that the campaign was vigorous and took place in an unrestricted atmosphere. A broad range of media provided voters with extensive information about parties and their activities. Public broadcasters generally provided balanced coverage of major parties.

The election law provides safeguards that promote democratic election practices, ensure transparency and protect the secrecy of the vote. However, concerns have been raised regarding the law allowing parties to choose, after the elections, which candidates take a seat in the parliament, disregarding the order on the candidate's list.

Election day was calm and orderly, with observers assessing the vote and the count positively.

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The international observers noted some procedural irregularities, such as low and flimsy voting screens which did not always ensure the secrecy of the vote, late opening of polling stations and procedures not fully observed during the count.

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