



Election Observation Mission

## PRESS RELEASE

### STATEMENT ON ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Belgrade, 22 September 1997 - The OSCE Observation Mission, which included the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, issued a preliminary report today based on the findings of its election observers. These observers numbered 156, and included 39 parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The OSCE monitored the election process from 29 August 1997.

From the beginning the OSCE has emphasized it does not subscribe to the view that the presence of its observers, as such, adds legitimacy to the election process. It is the observers' methodology and the resulting conclusion that form the basis of opinion on the election process.

The report of the former Spanish Prime Minister Filipe Gonzales served as a point of reference during the Observation Mission. In his report, Mr. Gonzales concluded that there are "deficiencies (of a structural nature) in the electoral system that make it possible to falsify or circumvent the sovereign will of the citizens, problems in the administration of justice that are calling into doubt, in the eyes of the citizenry, the independent operation of the justice system, and finally the obstacles confronting the independent media and the serious difficulties standing in the way to free and fair access to the public media."

The OSCE Observation Mission has concluded that the process leading up the elections day was flawed for the following reasons:

- the lack of clear written regulations governing each aspect of the election process;
- the biased coverage of the public media in favour of the ruling party; as well as the problems of licensing regulations governing the independent media;
- the lack of confidence in the neutrality of the centrally appointed core members of the election administration at all levels;
- the lack of confidence in the independent nature of the judiciary.

On the Election Day the majority of the observers reported that the technical implementation of the voting in the polling stations was good and in most places according to the law.

The OSCE recommends that the following serious concerns must be addressed to restore confidence in the election process in the Republic of Serbia:

- clear written regulations governing each step in the election process, including military voting, must be introduced;
- the state of media should become truly depoliticised and obstacles to independent media coverage lifted;
- amendments in the election law need to be made to ensure equitable participation in the election commissions at all levels from the very beginning of the election process;
- an independent judiciary must be established with regard to election processes.