



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA  
SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO**

**PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION  
28 December 2003**

**OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report**



Warsaw  
27 February 2003

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**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA  
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**PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS  
28 December 2003**

**OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report<sup>1</sup>**

**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Elections for the National Assembly (Parliament) of the Republic of Serbia took place on 28 December 2003, one year before the expiration of the mandate of the Parliament elected in December 2000. The elections were conducted generally in line with OSCE commitments. A high number of contestants presented voters with a genuine choice and, overall, the election process was well administered. However, distinct challenges remain, particularly in relation to the legislative framework for elections, which remains unchanged since October 2000.

A total of 19 parties, coalitions or groups of citizens registered their lists. Due to the broad range of choices, these elections were seen by many as the first in Serbia in which voters were able to vote for their preferred political option rather than for the party they dislike the least. Voter turnout was 58.75 per cent, the highest in national elections in Serbia since the fall of the Milosevic regime.

The lists of four parties or coalitions included persons indicted for war crimes. In three cases indictees were leading party lists. Formally such candidacies do not contradict Serbian law, as the individuals concerned have not been convicted by a court of law. However, it is questionable to use the presumption of innocence to justify the candidacy of persons who are now charged with war crimes and such candidacies convey the clear intention of some political parties in Serbia to adhere to the denounced legacy of the past.

The election campaign was lively and active. There were no serious incidents marring the campaign. The rhetoric used by contestants remained, overall, within the parameters for campaigning in a democratic society.

A wide range of broadcast and print media provided extensive and largely balanced coverage of the election campaign. The state media generally complied with the laws and regulations and provided overall neutral coverage of the election campaign. State television and radio offered all contestants equal amounts of free airtime. Private broadcasters provided extensive coverage of political and electoral issues, focusing on the main contestants. Similarly, print media also concentrated on the major parties.

Overall, the election administration worked in an efficient and transparent manner, despite the challenge of administering an election within a legal framework that entirely omits the establishment of an intermediate level of election administration and contains a number of deficiencies that make it burdensome to carry out an election. Contestants were guaranteed

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<sup>1</sup> This report is also available in Serbian. However, the English version remains the only official document.

representation at the central level on the Republican Election Commission (REC) and at the polling station level on Polling Boards. The voter registers, which were partly corrected and updated in 2003, require further improvements, and a central voter register should be established as envisaged in the law.

International observers rated the voting, counting and tabulation of results positively in the overwhelming majority of polling stations visited on 28 December. Multi-party Polling Boards worked effectively, in a co-operative spirit, and generally in accordance with procedures. However, international observers noted some specific problems, such as frequent group voting and overcrowding of polling stations. In addition, a general lack of adherence to procedures was noted in the municipality of Tutin. Polling was also conducted in Kosovo among the Serb population.

The presence of some 10,000 domestic non-partisan observers contributed to the high level of transparency on election day. While they were able to work without impediments, the rights of domestic and international observers should be guaranteed by law and criteria for their accreditation should be formalized.

The OSCE/ODIHR recommends that a comprehensive review of election legislation be undertaken as a matter of urgency, including repealing of provisions that:

- Allow parties and coalitions to strip elected representatives of their mandates, which runs contrary to the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document;
- Allow parties and coalitions to arbitrarily choose which candidates from their lists become members of parliament, thus limiting the transparency of the system, instead of determining the order of candidates beforehand; and
- Effectively disenfranchise a significant portion of the electorate due to lack of special voting provisions for voters who are hospitalized, homebound, imprisoned, or temporarily abroad.

The OSCE/ODIHR reiterates its willingness to assist the authorities and civil society of Serbia to overcome the challenges in the electoral framework outlined in this and previous reports.

## II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The 2003 parliamentary elections were monitored by an International Election Observation Mission formed by the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) of the Council of Europe.

The OSCE/ODIHR long-term Election Observation Mission (EOM) was established for the period from 27 November 2003 to 3 January 2004 and consisted of 24 election experts based in Belgrade and five regional centers, including in Kosovo. Mr. Nikolai Vulchanov (Bulgaria) headed the OSCE/ODIHR EOM. The OSCE PA delegation was led by Mr. Ihor Ostash (Ukraine), the PACE delegation was headed by Mr. Murat Mercan (Turkey), and the CLRAE delegation was led by Mr. Günter Krug (Germany). On election day, the IEOM comprised 178

international observers from 33 OSCE participating States, including 14 from the OSCE PA, seven from PACE and six from CLRAE.

The OSCE/ODIHR is grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro and the authorities of the Republic of Serbia, in particular the Republican Election Commission, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government for their assistance and co-operation during the course of the election observation. The OSCE/ODIHR is also grateful for the support and co-operation of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro and of international organizations and embassies of OSCE participating States accredited in Belgrade.

### III. POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE ELECTIONS

The 28 December 2003 parliamentary elections were called by the then Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Ms. Natasa Micic, on 13 November 2003, just three days before the most recent failed attempt to elect a President of the Republic of Serbia. The parliamentary elections were held almost exactly one year before the expiration of the mandate of the parliament which had been elected on 23 December 2000, following the fall of the regime of former Serbian and Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

The 23 December 2000 parliamentary elections gave the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), a group of 18 parties and organizations which had joined forces in order to defeat Milosevic in the September 2000 federal presidential elections, an overwhelming majority – 178 of 250 seats – in the National Assembly. The only other political parties to gain representation following the 2000 elections were the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) of Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) led by former Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Vojislav Seselj, and the Party of Serbian Unity (SSJ), which had been founded by late Zeljko Raznatovic, a.k.a. “Arkan”, warlord and accused war criminal.

Shortly after the 2000 parliamentary elections, political differences among DOS parties became apparent, both over the shape and the pace of reforms. The main opponents in this political struggle were the Democratic Party (DS) of the late Serbian Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjic, and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) of then Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica. In the summer of 2001, the DSS withdrew its support from the Serbian government and set up its own parliamentary group.

The conflict between the DS and DSS came to a head in 2002, when the DOS Presidency formally expelled the DSS from its ranks, and the parliament’s Administrative Committee, based on Art. 88 of the parliamentary election law, stripped the 45 DSS members of parliament of their mandates. This decision was later suspended as part of a compromise and the mandates were temporarily returned in November 2002. However, the decision to strip the DSS MPs of their mandates was never formally repealed, despite several rulings by the Serbian Constitutional Court in 2003 to the effect that mandates belong to the elected deputies rather than to political parties, and that members of parliament do not lose their mandates if they leave the party on whose ticket they were elected. Ultimately, the provisions allowing for control of mandates by parties, which was repeatedly criticised by OSCE/ODIHR as contravening the OSCE election-related commitments, has proved to be a source of political destabilization.

The political impasse resulting from this and other long-standing disputes among former partners in the DOS coalition has negatively influenced political life in Serbia, and has threatened to erode public confidence in the democratic process. The shock of the assassination of then premier Zoran Djindjic on 12 March 2003 further exacerbated the political environment and increased an already high level of frustration within society. While his successor Zoran Zivkovic continued reform policies, the political situation became increasingly volatile and the delicate balance in the parliament led to a stalemate, which delayed the adoption of key legislation.

The political deadlock was also aggravated by the fact that Serbia has been without an elected President since the end of 2002. Three rounds of presidential elections held in 2002 and 2003 were invalid due to voter turnout below the 50 per cent required for valid elections.

Calls for early parliamentary elections intensified throughout 2003, as relations between a number of the remaining DOS parties deteriorated and some parties withdrew from the coalition. The government's majority in the National Assembly continued to decrease, and it became increasingly unclear whether the government still had the support of a parliamentary majority at all, especially after the Social Democratic Party (SDP) withdrew its support on 9 November. During the campaign for the 16 November 2003 presidential elections, parliament debated no-confidence motions in the Speaker of Parliament and in the government. The debates were suspended on 6 November in order to allow members of parliament to participate in the election campaign and were scheduled to resume on 18 November. However, the motions were never put to a vote, as parliament was dissolved before the debate was scheduled to resume.

#### **IV. THE CONTESTANTS – CANDIDATE REGISTRATION**

Due to a wide choice from across the political spectrum and as a result of the general changes to the political situation in Serbia over the past years, these elections were seen by many as the first in which voters would be able to vote for their preferred option rather than for the party they dislike the least.

Under current Serbian legislation, political parties, coalitions, and groups of citizens can submit to the REC an application for certification of a candidate list. The application must be accompanied by at least 10,000 verified support signatures of eligible voters and other documentation proving each candidate's right of suffrage and business capacity. The deadline for submitting the candidatures for these elections expired at midnight on 12 December.

In order of certification, which also determines the order of appearance on the ballot, the Republican Election Commission registered the following parties and coalitions (this list includes the names of the bearers of the lists<sup>2</sup>, where applicable):

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<sup>2</sup> The "bearer of the list" ("nosilac liste") is a person whose name may appear on the ballot as part of the name of the candidates list. This person does not have to be a candidate or even a member of the party or coalition in question. In these elections, the only lists without a bearer were those of Otpor, Together for Tolerance, and the Yugoslav Left. The full name of the coalition Together for Tolerance included the names of the leaders of the three main parties; however, the coalition submitted a letter to the REC stating that the lists did not have a bearer.

- G17 Plus – Miroljub Labus;
- Serbian Radical Party – Vojislav Seselj;
- Democratic Party of Serbia – Vojislav Kostunica;
- Democratic Alternative – Nebojsa Covic;
- Democratic Party – Boris Tadic;
- Serbian Renewal Movement – New Serbia – Vuk Draskovic – Velimir Ilic;
- Otpor (Resistance);
- For People’s Unity – Borislav Pelevic – Marijan Risticcevic;
- Socialist Party of Serbia – Slobodan Milosevic;
- Independent Serbia – Vladan Batic;
- Defense and Justice – Vuk Obradovic – Borivoje Borovic;
- Together for Tolerance – Canak, Kasza, Ljajic;
- Liberals of Serbia – Dusan Mihajlovic;
- Reformists – Social Democratic Parties of Vojvodina-Serbia – Miodrag-Mile Isakov;
- Socialist People’s Party – People’s Bloc – General Nebojsa Pavkovic;
- Citizens’ Group “Economic Force of Serbia and Diaspora – Branko Dragas”;
- Labour Party of Serbia – Dragan Milovanovic;
- Union of Serbs of Vojvodina – Dusan Salatic; and
- Yugoslav Left – JUL.

In addition, the All-Serbian National Interest coalition filed its application for registration on 12 December but withdrew it the following day. The list of the Yugoslav Left (JUL) was initially rejected by the REC, which argued that the application lacked the necessary number of support signatures and was submitted by an unauthorized person. A JUL complaint against that decision was rejected by the REC on 14 December. On 17 December, however, following an appeal against the REC decision, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the JUL and gave the party 48 hours to correct deficiencies in its application. The REC certified the JUL list on 19 December.

Four of the candidate lists included persons indicted for war crimes, either as bearers of the list or as candidates. These included the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), whose leader Vojislav Seselj was the bearer of the list and the top candidate; the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), whose chairman Slobodan Milosevic was bearer and top candidate; the Socialist People’s Party – People’s Bloc (People’s Bloc leader General Nebojsa Pavkovic was the bearer of the list and also No. 11 on the candidate list); and the Liberals of Serbia (LS) of then Serbian Interior Minister Dusan Mihajlovic (the Chief of Serbian Police, General Sreten Lukic, was No. 3 on the list).

Formally such candidacies do not contradict Serbian law, as the individuals concerned have not been convicted by a court of law. However, it is questionable to use the presumption of innocence to justify the candidacy of persons who are now charged with war crimes and such candidacies convey the clear intention of some political parties in Serbia to adhere to the denounced legacy of the past.

## V. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### A. GENERAL OUTLINE

The Constitution of Serbia, adopted on 28 March 1990, establishes a unicameral National Assembly with 250 members, elected for a four-year term. In addition to the Constitution, the Law on Election of Members of Parliament (“the parliamentary election law”), adopted on 8 October 2000, provides the legislative framework for the elections. The law is also supplemented by numerous instructions and decisions issued by the Republican Election Commission.

Citizens of Serbia and Montenegro with registered permanent residence in Serbia who are at least 18 years old on election day enjoy the right to vote and to be elected as members of the National Assembly. In order to take part in the allocation of seats, a party must receive at least 5 per cent of the votes of voters who voted. The Republic of Serbia is one single constituency and mandates are distributed applying the d’Hondt formula.

A number of shortcomings were pointed out by OSCE/ODIHR after the 2000 elections<sup>3</sup> and have yet to be addressed or incorporated in the parliamentary election law:

1. The law entitles parties to terminate mandates of representatives who lost party membership, whether voluntary or following expulsion. Although the Serbian Constitutional Court has ruled that this provision violates the Serbian constitution, the law has yet to be amended. Furthermore, such a provision contradicts Paragraph 7.9 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document of the OSCE, to which Serbia and Montenegro is a signatory.
2. The provisions for allocating mandates permit parties or coalitions to select which candidates will receive mandates, regardless of a candidate’s position on the list.
3. The law provides that voting only takes place in polling stations in Serbia and in person, de facto disenfranchising a number of eligible voters such as persons temporarily resident abroad, homebound, hospitalized or imprisoned.
4. The election law does not provide a clear basis for determining the 5 per cent threshold for the allocation of mandates. Article 81 stipulates that seats shall be allocated to “candidates’ lists that have won at least 5 per cent of the voters who have voted”. This can be interpreted in a variety of ways.
5. The two-tiered system for election administration does not provide for an intermediate level between the REC and Polling Boards, which creates technical and logistical problems in conducting elections.
6. The law does not establish clearly the right of domestic or international observers to monitor the election process.
7. The law and the REC instructions contain an excessive number of provisions for dissolving Polling Boards on election day for violations or procedural irregularities. If all the

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<sup>3</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Final Report, 20 February 2001 ([http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election\\_reports/yu/2000fin.pdf](http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election_reports/yu/2000fin.pdf))

provisions are followed to the letter, these could result in a large number of repeat elections at individual polling stations.

8. The law provides that appeals against REC decisions must first be heard by the REC, before being lodged with the Supreme Court. The relatively short timeframe for lodging complaints to the REC begins from the moment that a contested decision was taken, raising the concern that should the complainant not receive notification of the decision in a timely manner, it may be too late to appeal.

While no amendments to the parliamentary election law were adopted since 2000, some provisions have been slightly modified either by REC instructions or by court rulings. This was not, however, the result of a systematic effort to revise the law, but only of a search for *ad hoc* solutions or a result of a formal court procedure initiated by political parties.

The Serbian Constitutional Court on 27 May 2003 declared as unconstitutional provisions from Art. 88, paragraph 1 and 9<sup>4</sup>, thus addressing the fundamental problem of whether parties or coalitions, or elected members of parliament have legal ownership over the mandates. According to the Constitutional Court decision, supplemented by a subsequent decision on 25 September 2003 on the same issue in the Law on Local Self-Government<sup>5</sup> regarding mandates in municipal assemblies, termination of membership of a political party cannot be taken as grounds for stripping an elected member of his or her mandate.

This decision, however, was not reflected in an amendment to the law because of the ongoing parliamentary crisis, which resulted in early parliamentary elections. The new parliament should amend the parliamentary election law in a way that brings it in line with Paragraph 7.9 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document, which states that OSCE participating States will “ensure that the candidates who obtain the necessary number of votes required by the law are duly installed in office and are permitted to remain in office until their term expires or is otherwise brought to an end in a manner that is regulated by law in conformity with democratic parliamentary and constitutional procedures”.

The election law allows a party to arbitrarily choose which candidates from its list become members of parliament, instead of determining the order of candidates beforehand. This limits the transparency of the system and gives political parties a disproportionately strong position *vis-à-vis* the candidates. Under proportional representation systems, the order on the list usually determines the allocation of mandates; otherwise, mandates are allocated on the basis of preferential votes for candidates. The current Serbian system results in voters not knowing which candidates are likely to be seated as a result of their support for a particular party.

The issue of the interpretation of Art.81, regarding the determination of the 5 per cent threshold for seat allocation, was addressed by the REC prior to the elections. The REC in an official interpretation, clarified that the threshold is calculated on the number of voters who go to the polls by counting the number of signatures on the extract of the voter register in each polling station. This allows for all votes, including invalid ones, and voters who received a ballot but

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<sup>4</sup> Art. 88 states that the term of office of Members of Parliament shall expire before the end of the period they have been elected for: “1. if they cease to be members of the political party or coalition whose candidate lists they have been elected on for the members of parliament.” [...] “9. if the political party, or other political organization whose list they have been elected from is deleted from the register with the competent body.”

<sup>5</sup> Art. 152, Law on Local Self-Government.

did not cast it, to influence the allocation of seats. As a result, such a provision also effectively raises the 5 per cent threshold in proportion to the number of invalid ballots cast. Theoretically, a party may receive over 5 per cent of valid votes cast but may fall short of this threshold if all signatures on the extracts are used as a basis for calculating the threshold. In this case, citizens who did not express a clear political preference would directly influence the composition of the new parliament.

Party and campaign financing was still regulated by the 1997 Law on Party Financing. This piece of legislation was not sufficient to provide high standards of disclosure or regulation on the important issue of party financing in general and campaign financing in particular. A new Law on Party Financing was adopted earlier in 2003, but as it only came into force on 1 January 2004, it did not apply to the 28 December 2003 parliamentary elections.

The OSCE/ODIHR reiterates that a comprehensive revision of the legislative framework for elections is long overdue. It is a necessary challenge for both the government and opposition parties to reach consensus on new electoral rules in the near future in order to address remaining shortcomings and improve the stability and credibility of elected bodies and authorities.

## VI. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

In accordance with the parliamentary election law, the 28 December elections were administered by a two-tier system: the Republican Election Commission (REC) and Polling Boards. Unlike the presidential election law, which envisages the inclusion of Municipal Election Commissions, the parliamentary election law omits this level of election administration. The absence of an intermediate level could potentially lead to logistical and organizational problems if the REC had to deal directly with more than 8,500 Polling Boards.

In order to find a practical solution to this shortcoming in the law, the REC created *ad hoc* Municipal Working Groups (MWGs) – intermediate bodies with technical and logistical tasks to which the REC delegated some of its authority. The members of MWGs were generally selected from among the membership of the Municipal Election Commissions (permanent multiparty bodies appointed by the municipal assemblies for a four-year term). The general rule of multiparty representation, which applies to both the REC and the Polling Boards, was not applied in the case of MWGs since formally they were not electoral bodies but merely an extension of the REC.

The REC performed its tasks in a generally constructive and transparent way. Sometimes faced with unclear legal provisions, the REC usually succeeded in reaching consensus on the interpretation of the law. However, reaching consensus became harder as election day drew closer. This was mainly due to the fact that ambiguous and unclear provisions in the law, namely on the procedure for the appointment of the extended composition of Polling Boards, were not tackled by the REC at an early stage. As a result, contestants in the elections interpreted procedures for submitting their lists of extended Polling Board members in different ways, which in turn increased pressure on REC technical staff already faced with tight deadlines.

## **A. REPUBLIC ELECTION COMMISSION (REC)**

The REC has overall responsibility for carrying out the elections. It ensures the legality of the elections, registers the candidate lists, conducts the technical preparations for the elections, appoints and dismisses Polling Boards, determines the election material, establishes the results and certifies mandates after the elections. Decisions are taken by a majority of all members eligible to vote.

The REC consists of “permanent” and “extended” members. The REC has 16 permanent members plus a chairman, who were appointed by Parliament in June 2002 for a term of 4 years. Each member has a deputy who votes in case of absence of a member and enjoys the same rights as the replaced member. Both the member and the deputy may be present at a session at the same time, but only one of them may vote. The extended composition of the REC includes representatives of the candidate lists – a member and a deputy member for each candidate list approved by the REC who have similar voting rights as permanent members. The REC also includes a non-voting member from the Republic Statistics Office and a non-voting Secretary, who is in charge of the technical aspects of the REC’s work.

## **B. REC DISTRICT CO-ORDINATOR**

The REC designated one of its members or deputy members as a co-ordinator for each of the 29 districts to act as a liaison between the REC and the Municipal Working Groups (MWGs). District Co-ordinators were directly involved in the delivery of the electoral material from the printing house to the MWGs and received the election material from the MWGs after the vote count had finished, in order to deliver it back to the REC. The Co-ordinators also performed other administrative duties and addressed challenges related to the conduct of the election in their districts. Each Co-ordinator was assisted by the District Prefect, a technical expert appointed by the REC and an official from the Republican Bureau of Statistics.

## **C. MUNICIPAL WORKING GROUPS (MWGs)**

Municipal Working Groups find their legal base in the Instructions for Carrying out the Law on Election of Representatives, a sub-legal act adopted by the REC. MWGs are appointed by the REC, on proposal of the REC Co-ordinator for the relevant district, and their membership is drawn from among MEC members and their deputies. The number of MWG members varies according to the number of polling stations in a municipality. A three-member group is set up for municipalities with less than 50 polling stations, while five-member MWGs are appointed for municipalities with a higher number of polling stations. The Secretary of the Municipal Assembly supports the work of the MWG.

Main duties of an MWG include the distribution of the electoral material to Polling Boards, and its collection and delivery back to the REC after counting has finished at the polling station level.

## **D. POLLING BOARDS**

The REC established 8,586 polling stations for these elections, with a corresponding number of Polling Boards. Polling Boards consisted of a chairman and at least two permanent members, as well as of extended members representing election contestants. The permanent members

were appointed by the REC upon the proposal of the REC District Co-ordinator. Registered submitters of candidate lists could nominate members for the extended composition of PBs. Polling Boards reached decisions by a majority of their members, including members of the extended composition of PBs.

#### **E. VOTING IN KOSOVO**

248 polling stations were established in 19 Kosovo municipalities where the Serb population resides. The administration of elections in Kosovo was co-ordinated from two main centres, located in the cities of Vranje and Raska. The REC appointed three of its members as Co-ordinators to supervise operations, supported by Municipal Working Groups.

### **VII. VOTER REGISTRATION**

On 26 December 2003, the REC announced that the total number of registered voters in Serbia was 6,511,450, a slight increase of around 5,000 over the November 2003 presidential elections. Unlike in past failed presidential elections, the voter register did not play such a vital role in the parliamentary elections since there is no minimum turnout requirement for valid elections. Nonetheless, shortcomings indicated in past OSCE/ODIHR reports still persist. Some opposition parties remain critical of the accuracy of the voter registers and accused the authorities of not addressing the concerns related to voter registers, in particular the lack of clear legislation regulating the administration and updating of the registers. They rightly point out that a unique voter register at Republic level does not in fact exist although it is foreseen by Serbian legislation. Instead, there is only an aggregate of the municipal registers.

Voter registers are kept and are updated by the municipal administration and aggregated by the REC. However, important components of the data, e.g. the registered permanent address and the unique number (JMBG) of the citizen, are maintained by the Ministry of Interior which is responsible for their accuracy and is providing them to the municipal authorities. All municipalities in Serbia have now adopted computerized data entry. However, significant differences in the software used by various municipalities complicate the process of cross-checking and aggregating the data. Throughout 2003, the Ministry for Public Administration and Local Self-Government undertook an effort to improve the accuracy of voter registration data in all 161 municipalities in Serbia proper. A considerable amount of incomplete or deficient entries were identified and corrected. The authorities also encouraged voters to verify whether their names were on the voter register, including through the Internet.

Unambiguous legislation stipulating which body is responsible for the maintenance of a central voter register, as well as legislative provisions introducing uniform guidelines for the maintenance of voters registers, will need to be urgently addressed by the new parliament. This will be essential to ensure confidence in the accuracy of the voter register in Serbia.

### **VIII. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND NATIONAL MINORITIES**

In the outgoing Serbian parliament, only 32 of the 250 members (12.8 per cent) were women. While underrepresented, women held several high positions in the previous Serbian parliament,

including that of Speaker of Parliament, one of the two Deputy Speakers, and Secretary of the parliament. Three out of 24 ministers in the government headed by Zoran Zivkovic were women, as was the government's secretary general.

In the December 2003 elections, around 20 per cent of candidates put forward by the various parties and coalitions were women. The lists with the highest proportion of women candidates were submitted by the Reformists – Social Democratic Parties of Vojvodina–Serbia (around 40 per cent) and the Labour Party (over 31 per cent), neither of which passed the 5 per cent threshold. The lowest share of women candidates were put forward by the Socialist Party of Serbia (less than 10 per cent), the Serbian Radical Party (just over 10 per cent), and the Serbian Renewal Movement–New Serbia coalition (less than 12 per cent). Among the parties which gained representation in the new parliament, G17 Plus and the DS had the highest proportion of women candidates, at 21–22 per cent.

After the announcement of the final results, the parties which passed the 5 per cent threshold nominated a total of 31 women to the parliament, which is one less than in the previous parliament and accounts for 12.4 per cent of the total number of deputies. Of these, 11 were candidates of G17 Plus (32.4 per cent of the party's MPs), 5 of the SRS (6.1 per cent), 7 of the DSS (13.2 per cent), 5 of the DS (13.5 per cent), 2 of the SPO–NS coalition (9.1 per cent), and one of the SPS (4.5 per cent).

Serbian election legislation does not contain any specific provisions regulating the participation of national minorities in the electoral process. Although there are no impediments to the formation of regional and ethnically-based political parties, there are also no provisions which would make it easier for parties representing national minorities to enter parliament, such as reserved seats. In essence, such parties are treated exactly the same as all other political parties.

National minorities were represented in the previous parliament especially by parties from Vojvodina and Sandzak, which were parts of the original DOS coalition. For the 2003 elections, a number of these parties joined forces in the Together for Tolerance coalition. In addition, the list of the Reformists – Social Democratic Parties of Vojvodina–Serbia included a high number of candidates stemming from national minorities. However, members of national minorities, and parties representing national minorities, were also included in the candidate lists of other parties. For example, members of the Coalition for Sandzak were included in the Democratic Party list, the Democratic Movement of Romanians was part of the "Independent Serbia" coalition, and the Vlach Democratic Party had candidates on the list of the Liberals of Serbia.

A number of Roma political parties were involved in the campaign, including the Roma Congress Party and the Democratic Party of Roma. Most of them supported the lists of Together for Tolerance and Reformists coalitions.

Ultimately, Together for Tolerance failed to clear the 5 per cent threshold and gain representation in the new parliament, as did most other lists which included representatives of national minorities. As a result, the representation of national minorities in the new parliament will be significantly reduced. As had been forecast earlier by analysts, the relatively high national turnout made it more difficult for Together for Tolerance to get more than 5 per cent of the votes cast.

Voting activity of most national minorities appears to have been in line with the general trend, with limited regional variations. Municipalities in Sandzak and in northern Vojvodina, where a significant minority population resides, showed a voter turnout slightly higher than the national average. On the other hand, municipalities in Southern Serbia with a concentration of ethnic Albanians recorded turnout well below the average. The Albanian population of Kosovo again showed little or no interest in these elections.

The participation of the Roma voters was rather low even in polling stations located in the Roma dominated municipalities. This may be a result of a lack of voter information campaign addressing the Roma population and the fact that a significant number of Roma are not registered to vote due to unresolved residency status and lack of identification documents.

## **IX. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN**

Fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and expression were respected, reflecting the significantly improved atmosphere for conducting elections since the downfall of the Milosevic regime. Serbian election legislation contains very few provisions — outside those regulating media coverage — pertaining to the election campaign. Most notably, it establishes a campaign silence period between the last 48 hours before election day until the polls are closed. During this period, the publication of opinion polls or exit polls is also forbidden. Despite the absence of legal campaign regulations, the conduct of the individual participants' campaign was not a matter of disputes or formal complaints by competitors.

Overall, the parliamentary election campaign was lively and active, in marked contrast to presidential election campaigns in 2002 and 2003. Many parties and coalitions started their campaigns in late November or early December, with some starting as early as the day after the failed presidential elections of 16 November. Most parties intensified their campaigns during the last two weeks before the elections. Parties used a variety of means to convey their message to the electorate, including billboards and posters, advertisements in print and broadcast media, and campaign events held throughout Serbia and attended by leading party politicians. Many parties also actively campaigned at the grass-roots level, including door-to-door visits by local party activists. The most visible campaigns were those of G17 Plus, DS, DSS, SRS, and Otpor. The SPS and many non-parliamentary parties, by contrast, started campaigning as late as one week before election day.

There were no serious incidents during the campaign. Unlike in previous elections in Serbia, the campaign rhetoric remained, overall, within the parameters for campaigning in a democratic society. Several contestants complained to the OSCE/ODIHR EOM that a few parties dominated the campaign, and that it was difficult for smaller parties to compete since their financial resources were limited. However, none of them alleged that their campaign had been obstructed by their competitors or by the authorities.

## **X. THE MEDIA AND ELECTIONS**

### **A. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The media coverage of electoral lists is governed by a variety of provisions, including articles of the parliamentary election law and of the Broadcasting Law, which is supplemented by a set of detailed instructions for broadcasters.

The Binding Instructions issued by the Broadcasting Council Agency on 1 December 2003 defined the conditions of the presentation of candidates' lists, both for state and private broadcasters. This set of regulations was extensive, precise and detailed, but occasionally it contradicted relevant provisions of the election legislation. The Binding Instructions provided that all broadcasters (state and private ones) should ensure equal opportunities for all contestants, including equal rates for paid advertisements.

Under the Broadcasting Law, and in line with the Binding Instructions, the Republic Broadcasting Agency (RBA) was entitled to monitor compliance by the state and private electronic media with the rules on coverage of election campaign and to act upon complaints from political parties. The RBA started monitoring national and local electronic media outlets on 15 December, i.e. only 13 days before election day and well into the election campaign, and issued further recommendations to broadcasters on the manner of reporting during the campaign.

Submitters of election lists filed complaints with the RBA, mainly concerning the failure of some electronic media to provide equal opportunities to all contestants. A number of parties expressed concerns regarding the lack of serious corrective measures at the disposal of the RBA, stressing that the procedure for considering complaints was too long and the prescribed measures ineffective.

Moreover, as already noted in the OSCE/ODIHR report on the previous presidential elections, apparent breaches in the appointment procedures of some of the members of the Agency, together with the lack of confidence in their neutrality expressed by some interlocutors, continue to undermine the credibility of this regulatory body.

### **B. MEDIA MONITORING**

A wide range of electronic and print media in Serbia provided an extensive coverage of the election campaign. Access to such a diverse variety of information and opinions afforded voters the opportunity to make an informed choice on election day.

On 29 November, the EOM began monitoring the political and campaign content of a variety of print and electronic media. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of four TV channels and four daily newspapers<sup>6</sup> were conducted on a daily basis in order to assess media coverage of candidates' lists and relevant political actors during the campaign.

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<sup>6</sup> The following electronic media were monitored: the first channel of state-owned Radio Television Serbia (TV RTS 1) and the private TV BK, TV PINK and TV B92. Among the print media, the dailies *Vecernje Novosti*, *Politika*, *Blic* and *Balkan* were monitored.

In the monitored period, the state media generally complied with the laws and regulations governing the coverage of electoral lists. All 19 lists were provided with an equal amount of free airtime during the special direct access programs on RTS 1 and RTS 2. Six debates were broadcast on RTS 1 allowing voters to compare the contestants' views. The tone of the state broadcaster's coverage was predominantly neutral.

Overall, print and electronic media performed in a professional way during the campaign and generally provided balanced reports on all lists. The tone of the campaign in the media was moderate, without instances of explicit hate speech, and quite different from the fierce rhetoric observed in previous electoral contests in Serbia.

Private broadcasters covered the elections with a number of different formats, including debates, thus providing a variety of settings for potential voters to observe the contestants interact. While private broadcasters generally provided an extensive amount of time for parties and coalitions to convey their messages, they tended to concentrate their coverage on the main contestants, with other lists sometimes experiencing difficulties in attracting media attention.

The three monitored private channels devoted greater airtime to DS, SRS, G17 Plus and DSS, which received a combined 43 per cent of the time allocated to politics. In contrast, during the campaign a number of smaller parties and coalitions received around one per cent of the political time. TV Pink and TV BK provided mostly neutral information about all lists, while TV B92 showed a critical attitude towards the Serbian Radical Party. This channel broadcast in the last week prior to election day an anti-Tomislav Nikolic (the SRS deputy leader) campaign spot, condemning his statement made during the last debate aired on TV B92<sup>7</sup>.

The monitored print media devoted more coverage to the DS, which in all four dailies received an average of 21 per cent of their political space. Substantial space was also given to the activities of the government, which was the second-most covered political subject in three out of four papers. The remaining space was mainly devoted to the leading parties SRS, G17 Plus and DSS; each of these parties received a combined average of nine per cent of the political space in the four dailies monitored. The SPS was close behind with an average of six per cent of the space. Activities of other parties and coalitions were given considerably less attention. The analysed print media provided mostly neutral coverage, with the exception of *Balkan*, which reported on the government and the DS in a negative tone.

Some parties and coalitions placed a considerable number of paid advertisements, both in electronic and print media. However, rates for political advertising were significantly higher than usual rates for commercial advertising, thus potentially limiting the possibility for some contestants to campaign.

A number of media outlets covered candidates in their capacity of government ministers or as leading experts in different fields during the 48-hour campaign silence period.

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<sup>7</sup> Tomislav Nikolic stated on TV B92 that he did not regret that Slavko Curuvija, an opposition journalist and publisher, was murdered in 1999.

## XI. RESOLUTION OF ELECTION DISPUTES

According to the legislative framework, electoral complaints can be lodged by a voter, candidate or authorized persons submitting the nomination of a candidate list. Prior to election day, all complaints are submitted to the REC, which has the power to take decisions by a majority vote of its full membership. Where a decision is not taken within the regulated timeframe, the complaint is automatically deemed rightful. Any persons affected by a decision of the REC can appeal to the Supreme Court within 48 hours. Supreme Court sessions are held *in camera* and even the complainant is not allowed to be present.

Very few complaints were filed with the REC after the elections, all regarding irregularities that might have led to the dissolution of the Polling Boards of polling stations where those irregularities occurred. In case a Polling Board is dissolved, voting has to be repeated within ten days. However, the REC rejected all official complaints on procedural grounds and no complainant appealed with the Supreme Court, perhaps reflecting the fact that there was more general political agreement on the overall regularity of the elections.

The fact that the Court of Appeals and the Administrative Court, envisaged by the new Law on Courts adopted in 2001, had not been yet established became a source of confusion in the run-up to these elections. According to the new law, the newly established courts should, from 1 January 2004, take up a number of competencies that previously fell to the Supreme Court, including ruling on appeals against REC decisions. However, the new courts were not functional as no judges had yet been appointed. The judges of the Supreme Court declared on 26 December that they would rule on possible election complaints also after 1 January 2004, applying thereby the existing law. They argued that the parliamentary election law is a *lex specialis* which leaves complaints in the exclusive competence of the Supreme Court, regardless of whether the new Administrative Court will be established or not. Ultimately, the question of which courts were competent to rule on election-related complaints did not become an issue since no appeals were filed against REC decisions taken after election day. Nonetheless, such a system could potentially lead to a legal vacuum in which complaints are not properly addressed. The OSCE/ODIHR recommends a comprehensive review of the election disputes resolution process to ensure an efficient, inclusive and transparent process.

## XII. DOMESTIC OBSERVERS

The rights of non-partisan observers, whether domestic or international, to monitor the election process are not provided for in Serbian election legislation. However, the REC, as in previous elections, issued an instruction allowing observers to be accredited and to be given full access to the election process.

As in previous elections, the entire election process was observed closely by the Belgrade-based Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID). CeSID again deployed some 10,000 observers to monitor voting and counting and, based on its presence in almost all polling stations throughout the country, was able to provide voter turnout figures and parallel vote tabulations of the count which were both timely and accurate. The work of CeSID contributed significantly to the transparency of the election day process and the public confidence in the accuracy of the results.

### **XIII. OBSERVATION OF VOTING, COUNTING AND VOTE TABULATION**

Polling on 28 December 2003 took place in a calm and relaxed atmosphere and was generally conducted in accordance with the law and regulations. Turnout was 58.75 per cent, the highest since the federal elections in September 2000.

#### **A. VOTING**

As in all national elections observed by ODIHR in Serbia since December 2000, international observers rated the polling procedures positively in the overwhelming majority of polling stations visited. Voting was rated as “excellent” in 38 per cent of polling stations observed, and as “good” in a further 52 per cent. Only in 2 per cent of polling stations was the conduct of the vote assessed as “poor” and in 6 per cent as “fair”.

While campaign material was noted within a 50-meter radius from a polling station in 8 per cent of all visits, active campaigning inside or outside a polling station was observed during less than 1 per cent of visits. Likewise, observers noted only a few isolated cases of a tense atmosphere or intimidation, or of unauthorized persons interfering in the work of the Polling Board.

Observers again noted that access to polling stations was difficult in some 12 per cent of polling stations visited, which could effectively prevent elderly and disabled voters in particular from reaching their polling station.

Polling Boards worked efficiently and impartially, and they generally tried to implement voting procedures in the correct manner. However, voters’ privacy was not always ensured, especially in polling stations which were too small for the registered number of voters or where voting screens of substandard design were used. In around 12 per cent of polling stations visited, observers noted that at least some voters did not mark their ballots in secret. Furthermore, observers noted that around 18 per cent of polling stations visited were overcrowded, at least partly due to the high number of extended Polling Board members.

In 13 per cent of polling stations visited, observers noted that the Polling Board did not prevent “group voting” (more than one voter marking ballots at voting booths simultaneously, usually members of the same family). On the other hand, no instances of proxy voting (a person voting on behalf of somebody else) were observed.

Another problem, noted once again, was that Polling Boards did not always systematically check voters’ identification before handing out ballots (10 per cent of polling stations visited) or check for traces of invisible ink on voters’ fingers (4 per cent). However, most instances were observed in rural areas where voters are generally personally known to the Polling Board. In around 18 per cent of polling stations visited, one or more voters were turned away because their name was not on that polling station’s extract of the voter list. Only during four visits (out of a total of 860), did international observers note that persons not on the voter register were allowed to vote.

Major political parties were well-represented on the permanent composition of Polling Boards. In almost 50 per cent of polling stations visited on election day, one Polling Board member belonged to the DS, while on 36 per cent of Polling Boards the DSS was represented. The SPS

and SRS each had permanent members on around 20 per cent of Polling Boards, and G17 Plus on 12 per cent, while one or more other parties were represented on the permanent Polling Board composition in some 40 per cent of polling stations. In addition, political parties were generally represented on the extended membership of Polling Boards. Each of the six parties or coalitions which passed the five-percent threshold was represented in the extended membership of more than 90 per cent of polling stations visited.

Despite the generally positive assessment of the electoral process, international observers identified certain areas of concern. In the municipality of Tutin in the southwest of Serbia, numerous problems were noted, including the only case of election-related violence observed by international observers on 28 December 2003. International observers deployed to Tutin reported a general lack of adherence to procedures, including group voting taking place in half the polling stations visited and invisible ink often not being applied.

## **B. VOTE COUNT**

Observers also evaluated the vote count in positive terms, generally describing it as quick and efficient. Some 30 per cent of vote counts observed were assessed as “excellent”, and a further 46 per cent as “good”. By contrast, 14 per cent were evaluated as “fair” and 7 per cent as “poor”.

In most cases, procedures to safeguard the integrity of the vote were implemented as envisaged by the election law and REC regulations. Observers noted, however, that Polling Boards did not always count the number of unused ballots or determine the number of voters who had voted (based on the number of signatures on the voter list) before opening the ballot box and counting the ballots in the box.

Polling Board members and observers could follow the vote count without hindrance and could scrutinize the ballots in almost all polling stations. Only from one polling station did observers report that there was disagreement over the determination of valid and invalid ballots. Only in three of the 70 polling stations visited for the vote count was a formal complaint attached to the minutes. Only in 4 per cent of polling stations visited, extended Polling Board members representing the top-scoring parties were not given a copy of the minutes. In around 13 per cent of polling stations visited, the results were not put on public display outside the polling station.

Observers also accompanied Polling Boards to the Municipal Working Groups where the Polling Boards handed over the election material for transfer to the REC. The processing of results at this stage was generally transparent, although the premises of some 15 per cent of the MWGs visited were overcrowded as many Polling Boards arrived there at the same time. Observers noted in 16 per cent of the MWGs visited that polling station protocols contained deficiencies, which were generally corrected on the spot.

## **C. TABULATION OF ELECTION RESULTS**

The REC processed the results of these elections efficiently and transparently and could announce the official results on 30 December, i.e. within the legal deadline. The REC announced turnout figures from a representative sample of polling stations several times during the course of election day, while preliminary results were announced at several times during

election night. All REC members were able to receive electronic copies of the election results. There was no challenge to the accuracy of results.

#### **XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The OSCE/ODIHR reiterates its previous recommendation that election legislation should be reviewed comprehensively and as a matter of urgency. In doing so, the newly elected parliament should consider recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR in this and in previous Final Reports on parliamentary and presidential elections, and also the Assessment of Election Legislation in the Republic of Serbia issued in April 2001. In particular, attention should be given to ensuring compliance of the parliamentary election law with the OSCE commitments stemming from the 1990 Copenhagen Document, to which Serbia and Montenegro is a signatory.

##### **A. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

1. The legislative inconsistencies between the parliamentary and presidential election system should be removed. Improvements made to the presidential election law, in particular with regards to the role of Municipal Election Commissions, should be incorporated into the parliamentary election law.
2. Special provisions for out-of-polling station voting, including for disabled, hospitalized and those temporarily away from their homes, should be introduced in order to guarantee the right to vote of all eligible citizens. Such provisions should be based on secure mechanisms to ensure integrity of the process and avoid diminishing the safeguards for a democratic election.
3. Provisions regarding the ownership of mandates of elected representatives (Art. 88 of the parliamentary election law) should be amended to reflect recent Constitutional Court rulings and to bring it in line with OSCE commitments.
4. The 5 per cent threshold for gaining parliamentary representation should be calculated on the basis of valid votes cast, not based on the number of signatures on the voter lists.
5. The law should be amended to oblige political parties and coalitions to determine and announce the order of candidates on their list beforehand, rather than letting them choose after election day which candidates will be awarded mandates.
6. Consideration could be given to amending the law to facilitate the representation of national minorities in the parliament.
7. The rights of domestic and international non-partisan observers should be guaranteed in the law, and criteria for their accreditation should be stipulated clearly.

##### **B. ELECTION COMMISSIONS**

8. The legal framework should be amended in order to provide a role for Municipal Election Commissions in the election process. This could reduce logistical problems

and would provide a better level of political pluralism by providing multi-party representation at all levels of the election administration

9. The parliamentary election law should be amended to ensure that Polling Boards may only be dissolved by the REC, following a formal complaint about serious violations.

#### **C. CAMPAIGN AND THE MEDIA**

10. Consideration should be given to the removal of those provisions in the election legislation superseded by provisions of the Broadcasting Law, in order to ensure more consistency in the legal framework for the media during the campaign.
11. Rates for political advertising should not be higher than commercial rates for the same time slots.

#### **D. VOTER REGISTRATION**

12. A single, unified voter register for the Republic should be established as envisaged in the law. Overall responsibility and authority for its maintenance should be given to a single State body.
13. Current efforts to improve the accuracy of voter registers should continue in order to remove remaining deficiencies. In particular, control checks for duplicate entries and entries with incomplete or incorrect data should be conducted continuously at the Republic level.
14. Civil records held by municipalities in electronic form should be maintained using a single uniform software throughout the Republic. Links should be created between municipalities in order to allow for the verification of errors or duplicates in civil records.
15. The parliamentary election law should be amended to require voter registers to be publicly accessible at polling stations in advance of an election.
18. Political parties' access to voter registers should be regulated in the law. However, safeguards should be introduced to protect citizens' right to privacy.

#### **E. ELECTION DISPUTES**

19. A thorough review of the election disputes resolution process should be conducted in order to ensure an efficient, inclusive and transparent process.
20. Appeals to the Supreme Court should be held in public and the parties to the appeal should have the right to present their case directly or through legal representation.

#### **F. ELECTION DAY**

21. Polling stations should be selected to ensure that their size and layout is suitable and that they offer unimpeded access to elderly and disabled voters. This is of particular

importance in an election with a high number of contestants and, therefore, big Polling Boards.

22. The quality of voter screens should be standardized in such a way that they ensure the secrecy of the vote.
23. Training of polling board members should ensure the proper conduct of all voting and vote count procedures on election day. In particular, serious efforts to prevent “group voting” should be undertaken by the REC.
24. The results should be put on public display outside every polling station after the polling station is closed and the vote count completed.

## APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF OFFICIAL RESULTS

Elections for the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, 28 December 2003

The Republican Election Commission announced the following official results on 30 December 2003.

Number of voters registered in the voter register	6,511,450
Total number of voters who voted	3,825,471
Number of received ballot papers	6,527,341
Number of unused ballots	2,701,870
Number of used ballots	3,824,557
Number of invalid ballots	49,755
Number of valid ballots	3,774,802

Number of votes and number of mandates which the individual electoral lists received:

Ordinal Number	Name of Electoral List	Number of Votes Received by Electoral List	Number of Mandates Received by Electoral List
1	Serbian Radical Party – Dr. Vojislav Seselj	1,056,256	82
2	Democratic Party of Serbia – Vojislav Kostunica	678,031	53
3	Democratic Party – Boris Tadic	481,249	37
4	G17 Plus – Miroљjub Labus	438,422	34
5	Serbian Renewal Movement – New Serbia – Vuk Draskovic – Velimir Ilic	293,082	22
6	Socialist Party of Serbia – Slobodan Milosevic	291,341	22
7	Together for Tolerance – Canak, Kasza, Ljajic	161,765	0
8	Democratic Alternative – Nebojsa Covic	84,463	0
9	For People’s Unity – Prof. Borislav Pelevic and Marijan Risticovic	68,537	0
10	Otpor (Resistance)	62,545	0
11	Independent Serbia – Dr. Vladan Batic	45,211	0
12	Socialist People’s Party – People’s Bloc – General Nebojsa Pavkovic	27,596	0
13	Liberals of Serbia – Dusan Mihajlovic	22,852	0
14	Reformists – Social Democratic Parties of Vojvodina-Serbia – Miodrag-Mile Isakov	19,464	0
15	Defense and Justice – Vuk Obradovic and Borivoje Borovic	18,423	0
16	Economic Force of Serbia and Diaspora – Branko Dragas	14,113	0
17	Labour Party of Serbia – Dragan Milovanovic	4,666	0
18	Yugoslav Left – JUL	3,771	0
19	Union of Serbs of Vojvodina – Dusan Salatic	3,015	0

## ABOUT THE OSCE/ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is the OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Document).

The ODIHR, based in Warsaw, Poland, was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 100 staff.

The ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. It co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers every year to assess whether elections in the OSCE area are in line with national legislation and international standards. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into all elements of an electoral process. Through assistance projects, the ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include the following thematic areas: rule of law, civil society, freedom of movement, gender equality, and trafficking in human beings. The ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programs annually, seeking both to facilitate and enhance State compliance with OSCE commitments and to develop democratic structures.

The ODIHR monitors participating States' compliance with OSCE human dimension commitments, and assists with improving the protection of **human rights**. It also organizes several meetings every year to review the implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments by participating States.

The ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies. The Office also acts as a clearing-house for the exchange of information on Roma and Sinti issues among national and international actors.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website ([www.osce.org/odihhr](http://www.osce.org/odihhr)).