

**Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**  
**Election Observation Mission to Ukraine 1998**  
252 001 Kyiv, Vul. Hreschatik 16, #707. Tel/Fax: (+380 44) 229 7509; Tel. 229 1273

---

**PRESS STATEMENT**

Upon invitation from the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ukrainian Central Election Commission, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) has established an Election Observation Mission in Ukraine for the 29 March elections.

The Election Observation Mission is headed by Mr. Kåre Vøllan of Norway, and will be responsible for co-ordinating the activities of an estimated 200 international short-term observers over the election period. These observers will be drawn from a wide range of OSCE participating States, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe, and members of the international community in Ukraine.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission will have a presence of some 15 international long-term observers throughout the country. Part of the role of the long-term international observer presence is to observe the pre-electoral processes, such as the election campaign, the political context of the election and to assess the laws governing the electoral process. The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission will continue to have regular meetings with national and local election commissions, many of the political parties contesting the elections, government officials, members of the media, representatives of the international diplomatic community and Ukrainian and international organisations active in the fields of civic education and democratisation.

During its temporary presence in Ukraine, the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission will work in close cooperation with the on-going OSCE Mission in Kyiv and in Simferopol.

For the election period itself, observers will operate in teams of two covering the voting process as well as the count. The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission will issue a preliminary statement after the 29 March elections, based on its long-term findings as well as the reports from its observers on election day.

However, recent developments regarding the media in Ukraine do warrant a brief comment at this stage. The forced closure of one newspaper and the potential imposition of an extraordinarily severe fine on a second are highly disturbing. The fact that these events have occurred just prior to an election makes them all the more worrying.

Ukraine has taken up obligations as an OSCE participating State to respect the rights and freedoms of the press, regardless of political orientation. In the case of *Pravda Ukrainy*, the rushed suspension of the printing of the newspaper does not appear to be warranted. If any laws were broken then the case should of course be pursued in the appropriate manner, but respect for freedom of the press should still be maintained.

In the case of *Vseukrainiye Vedomosti* it is difficult to understand the appropriateness of a fine of such magnitude which, if imposed, would actually lead to the closure of the newspaper. Even the threat of such a fine could serve to have a damaging effect on editorial freedom.

The Election Observation Mission will continue to monitor the freedom of the media and all other aspects of the election campaign, and will continue to meet with representatives of all concerned parties.

Kåre Vøllan, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission to Ukraine 1998  
Kyiv, 20 February 1998