

Press release

Second round of Ukrainian election failed to address election irregularities and lacked transparency

KYIV, 22 November 2004 - The second round of the presidential election in Ukraine on 21 November did not meet a considerable number of OSCE commitments, Council of Europe and other European standards for democratic elections. As in the first round, state executive authorities and the Central Election Commission displayed a lack of will to conduct a genuine democratic election process, concluded the International Election Observation Mission in a preliminary statement released today.

Between the two rounds, the Mission reported cases of public sector employees and students being pressured to support the current Prime Minister, Mr. **Viktor Yanukovich**. Nevertheless, a vibrant civil society demonstrated once again a high level of interest and engagement. Despite serious shortcomings in the process the second round of the election offered voters a choice, although campaign conditions were not equal.

"With an even heavier heart than three weeks ago, I have to repeat the message from the first round; this election did not meet a considerable number of international standards for democratic elections," said Mr. **Bruce George**, President emeritus of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Special Co-ordinator for the short-term observers. "The deficiencies have not been addressed. The abuse of state resources in favor of the Prime Minister continued, as well as an overwhelming media bias in his favor."

The Head of the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. **Doros Christodoulides**, said: "There were some encouraging aspects which we did not see in the first round, such as a televised debate of the main candidates on state TV and redress, even if only partial, to the imbalanced media coverage. But we are greatly disappointed by the inflammatory campaign language, which increased prior to the second round."

Mr. **Marek Maciej Siwiec**, Head of the European Parliament delegation added: "The opportunity to improve the electoral process between the two rounds was not used. However, some improvement on media coverage was noticed. It is encouraging that the people of this country did once again express great interest in the election, manifesting a strong democratic spirit. Our delegation will now report back to the parliament with suggested recommendations."

"The figures and reports about the unjustified increase in the use of absentee voter certificates and the even higher increase of mobile voting, cast a shadow over the genuineness of the results," said Mr. **Lucio Malan**, Head of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation. "Moreover the turnout in some territorial election commissions in Donetsk, exceeding 98.5 per cent, and increasing by 21 per cent after the first round, are

unrealistic and highly suspicious."

Ambassador **Geert-Hinrich Ahrens**, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR's long-term observation mission, stressed that the electoral process was not concluded and urged transparency, especially in the tabulation of the votes. "While this was certainly a competitive election, it was not conducted on a level playing field. However, there is still time for the authorities to take every measure to reassure voters that the results were accurately processed."

On election day, voting was conducted in a generally calm manner. However observers assessed election day less favourably than in the first round, particularly in the central and eastern regions.

Observers noted more serious violations, including some isolated incidents of violence, and a pattern of intimidation, including directed towards observers, polling commission members and individual voters. In a significant number of polling stations, commission members had been dismissed. In some instances, unauthorized persons were interfering in or directing the process, or otherwise attempting to influence voters.

The observers' assessment of the ballot counting process was worse than on 31 October, including poorer overall organisation, and more questions were raised about the accuracy of results reported. Problems included lack of sufficient attention to ballot security and counting procedures. In almost 40 per cent of polling stations, unauthorized persons were present, including police and local government officials.

The IEOM included 563 observers from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. A final report will be released approximately six weeks after the completion of the electoral process.