

## **Ukraine's elections open and competitive but amendments to law of some concern, international observers say**

KYIV, 1 October 2007 - The 30 September parliamentary elections in Ukraine were conducted mostly in line with international commitments and standards for democratic elections and confirm an open and competitive environment for the conduct of election processes, the OSCE-led International Election Observation Mission concluded in a joint preliminary statement today.

Voters had a diverse choice of candidates and parties and the fundamental freedoms of assembly and expression were respected. However, recent amendments to the election law adopted as a part of a compromise to end the political crisis, impacted negatively on the election process. Election day was calm and orderly, with the main problems connected to voter lists. The count was assessed positively, though procedures were not always strictly adhered to.

Some 140 parliamentarians and 570 short-term observers monitored the elections for the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), the European Parliament (EP) and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, (NATO PA).

"Despite difficult circumstances, these elections were conducted in a positive and professional manner. The high turnout on election day was the Ukrainian people's contribution to overcoming the political crisis. It is now the turn of the political forces to deliver," said Tone Tingsgaard, the Special Co-ordinator of the short-term election observers and Vice President of the OSCE PA.

Hanne Severinsen, the Head of the PACE delegation, said: "Politicians must start playing by the rules instead of playing with the rules. The electoral law was not perfect and the amendments introduced during the political crisis failed to improve it. This was apparent from the number of people losing their right to vote because of traveling. Nevertheless, I was heartened by the efforts of the electoral administrators to remedy the situation and secure voter rights. Now it is time for the politicians to meet the expectations of the society and not just work for political self interest."

Adrian Severin, who headed the EP delegation, said: "We have observed that during the electoral campaign all main political parties in Ukraine expressed the desire to see their country fully integrate into the EU, to positively contribute to Europe's relations with Russia, as well as to carry out a comprehensive constitutional reform at home. In order to accomplish these goals, it is essential for all Ukrainian political forces to respect the free will expressed by the Ukrainian people, to form a stable government which would respect the pre-electoral consensus for power-sharing between the coalition and opposition and thereby to start realizing an ambitious national reform agenda."

"We were concerned by the problems with the voter lists, which were mainly due to the specific circumstances of this pre-term election, but I was very encouraged by the orderly and transparent processes we witnessed on election day," said the Head of the NATO PA delegation, Jan Petersen.

Ambassador Audrey Glover, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term mission, said: "Despite the confusion caused by recent amendments to the law, there was a clear political will and effort to make these elections meet international commitments. The next step is to further consolidate the electoral framework."

While amendments to the law, the poor quality of voter lists and possible disenfranchisement of voters who crossed the borders after 1 August caused concern, observers in all parts of Ukraine reported that many voters not on the lists were nevertheless allowed to cast their ballot. An additional concern was the removal of legal provisions safeguarding the integrity of homebound voting.

The campaign was generally calm and a diverse media environment provided for broad coverage of the campaign. There were, however, cases of hidden political advertising and campaigning by State and local officials who were not candidates.

The Central Election Commission handled most technical aspects efficiently, but the pattern of CEC members voting along party lines at times hampered its work and delayed certain decisions. Women remain under-represented on candidate lists.

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