

Montenegro's elections met almost all OSCE commitments

Special Co-ordinator Roberto Battelli: Democracy strengthened

The 29 March 2009 parliamentary elections in Montenegro met almost all international commitments and standards, but the process again underscored the need for further democratic development, the international election observation mission concluded in its preliminary post-election statement on 30 March at a press conference in Podgorica.

"I have long watched Montenegro's political and economic development, both before and after its independence. In those years, the country has made steady democratic progress and Election Day was truly impressive. There is no doubt in my mind that these elections further strengthened Montenegro's democracy," said Roberto Battelli, Head of the delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) and Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE short-term observer mission.

The international observation mission was comprised of close to 190 observers from 40 countries, including 22 representatives from OSCE PA, 14 from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and 30 long-term observers from OSCE/ODIHR.

Overall, the elections were organized professionally, and political parties were able to present their programmes to voters freely, the mission stated. The voting and counting process was evaluated highly positively – or in 98 percent of the almost 700 polling stations visited – by the observers, with very few incidents reported. The vote count was evaluated positively in all but one case.

The observers noted, however, that lack of public confidence remained a key challenge, as frequent allegations of electoral fraud and a blurring of state and party structures created a negative atmosphere among many voters.

The comprehensive legal framework generally provides an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections,



although it has not yet been fully harmonized with the new Constitution. A variety of safeguards are in place to protect the integrity of the ballot and voter registers are generally adequate after a transparent and well-organized registration process.

Other remaining challenges include a lack of adequate legal redress and insufficient critical reporting by most broadcast media.

There is still also a lack of clarity in the complaint procedures and court consideration of election cases could have benefitted from greater transparency, the statement also said.

The OSCE PA's observation mission was supported by Ambassador Andreas Nothelle from the Vienna Liaison Office, Klas Bergman, Director of Communications at the International Secretariat in Copenhagen, and Research Fellow Paul Pryce from the Vienna office.

OSCE parliamentarians to observe elections in Moldova

Petros Efthymiou, head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's election observation mission to Moldova, is scheduled to arrive in Chisinau on Wednesday in preparation for Sunday's parliamentary elections.

Mr. Efthymiou, chairman of the OSCE PA General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment, has been appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as the Special Co-ordinator to lead the OSCE short-term observers and deliver the post-election statement on behalf of the OSCE at a press conference in Chisinau on Monday 6 April.

The observation delegation to Moldova from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly consists of 57 parliamentarians from 23 countries.

In a pre-election visit to Moldova on 17 March, Mr. Efthymiou noted the considerable pluralism in the political landscape of Moldova and stressed the importance of the upcoming elections being conducted in a democratic manner in accordance with OSCE commitments for free and fair elections.

"I also see some remaining challenges during the electoral campaign such as allegations of pressure or intimidation and the accuracy of the voter register," Mr. Efthymiou said during his visit in March.

In the coming days, the OSCE PA delegation will be holding a series of meetings with Moldovan authorities and political party leaders, as well as with OSCE representatives and other parliamentary organizations.