



OSCE/ODIHR ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
9 APRIL 2000

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Tbilisi, 10 April 2000 – The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission concluded that considerable progress is necessary for Georgia to fully meet its commitments as a participating State of the OSCE. Fundamental freedoms were generally respected during the election campaign and candidates were able to express their views. However, improvements are necessary in the legal framework, the performance of the State media and the implementation of counting and tabulation procedures. Regrettably, voting did not take place in Abkhazia and in part of Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

Eleven candidates, two of them in detention, applied for registration to the Central Election Commission. Seven party nominated and independent candidates were registered through a procedure that was not fully transparent. Two of the candidates, who were refused registration, appealed to the Supreme Court, which upheld the original decision. The Labourist party together with a number of smaller political parties boycotted the election. The National Democratic Party invited the electorate to vote against all candidates

Only two candidates, incumbent President Eduard Shevardnadze and Jumber Patiashvili, campaigned actively, organizing numerous meetings with supporters. However, the tone of the campaign occasionally went beyond acceptable limits. The authorities did not behave impartially and gave strong support for the election campaign of the incumbent. There was no clear dividing line between State affairs and the incumbent's campaign. Also, opposition candidates complained that visits of foreign dignitaries were used, at times openly, for campaign purposes. The campaign of the other candidates was low key. Aslan Abashidze, Chairman of the Supreme Council of Ajara did not use his free airtime and Tengiz Asanidze, who has been in pre-trial detention, was unable to do so. Both withdrew on 8 April although Tengiz Asanidze's withdrawal was not accepted by the Central Election Commission.

Outside the free airtime allocated to registered candidates for political advertising, the State media failed to fulfill their obligations to provide balanced reporting on the candidates and gave the incumbent a clear advantage. Similarly, the regional Ajara television channel clearly favored Aslan Abashidze. The coverage of candidates in the private media was more balanced, although the incumbent again received highest amount of coverage, both in time, space and quality of coverage.

Substantial amendments to the electoral legislation were adopted less than three weeks before election day, causing confusion among the election administration and some political parties, in particular those entitled to appoint new members to the election commissions. While the amendments addressed a number of concerns raised previously by international observers, other concerns were remedied only partially or not at all. Further, the amendments enhanced the powers of the Chairpersons of the election commissions at all levels, thus creating new concerns.

Despite amendments stipulating the inclusion of additional representatives of the parliamentary minority in election commissions at all levels, the parliamentary majority retained to a large extent its dominant position in the election administration. In fact, the implementation of the amendments was delayed past legal deadlines, thus frequently preventing the new members from fully participating in the administration of the election process. In addition to facing difficulties in the implementation of the election legislation due to late amendments, on a number of occasions the Central Election Commission applied the legal provisions selectively.

Other important concerns relate to the accuracy and transparency of voter lists, location of election commission premises in local government buildings and a number of ambiguous, vague and sometimes contradictory procedural provisions of the election legislation.

On election day, observers reported that voting was conducted in a generally calm atmosphere and polling stations were not crowded. The quality of polling varied across the country. While problems were reported in Imereti, Kvemo Kartli and Samegrelo regions, polling in Adjara marked progress. However, observers reported series of identical signatures on the voter lists, group voting and presence of unauthorized persons, including police and local officials, in the polling stations.

The election process deteriorated after the close of polls. Counting and tabulation procedures lacked uniformity and, at times, transparency. While in some polling stations the law was properly implemented, in others it became apparent during the counting that ballot box stuffing had taken place. Instances of protocol tampering were reported as well.

Regrettably, in a few cases domestic and international observers were impeded in their work.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission calls upon the Georgian authorities to vigorously investigate breaches of the criminal code, related to election violations.

The OSCE/ODIHR will monitor the follow-up to the above concerns, and stands ready to continue the dialogue with the Parliament, the Government and other authorities of Georgia with a view to addressing these concerns.

This statement of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the 9 April 2000 Presidential Elections in Georgia is issued prior to completion of the tabulation of results, the resolution of complaints, and appeals and the publication of the final results. The ODIHR will issue a comprehensive report in about a month.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission wishes to express appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Central Election Commission, and the Parliament of Georgia for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the observation.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission was established on 9 March 2000 in Tbilisi, covering most of the 75 districts throughout Georgia. Mr. Nikolai Vulchanov heads the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission. The observation includes the pre-election preparations and the election campaign. The Election Observation Mission monitored three television channels and four daily newspapers. On election day, the EOM deployed some 150 short-term observers from 24 OSCE participating States to observe polling procedures, counting and tabulation of votes. Observers visited some 700 polling stations out of the 2600 across Georgia.

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