

# OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission to Slovakia 1999

*Nam. 1. maja 11*

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## **Second Round of the Election for the President of the Slovak Republic Preliminary Statement of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission issued on 30 May 1999**

This is the second preliminary statement of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) Election Observation Mission for the May 1999 Presidential Election in the Slovak Republic.

The ODIHR Election Observation Mission would like to thank the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Slovak Ministry of the Interior and the Central Election Commission (CEC) for their strong support and co-operation.

### **Summary of Conclusions**

- **The ODIHR Election Observation Mission found that the second round of the Presidential election was held in accordance with the Slovak electoral provisions. As for the first round held on 15 May, Slovak authorities administered the election process efficiently, and the voting and counting procedures on election day were carried out in accordance with OSCE commitments.**
- **The ODIHR Election Observation Mission welcomes the CEC decision to accredit both domestic observer groups, thus increasing the transparency of the process.**
- **Public Television provided a balanced coverage of the second round of the election during the official campaign. Not all media outlets respected the provisions related to the campaign silence period.**

### **The Electoral Framework**

The ODIHR Election Observation Mission reiterates its assessment of the electoral framework as presented in its first preliminary statement issued on 16 May.

The ODIHR Election Observation Mission welcomes the CEC decision to accredit both domestic observer groups, thus increasing the transparency of the process. Nevertheless, the inclusion in the legislative framework of specific provisions for observers to monitor all stages of the election process in line with paragraph 8 of the OSCE Copenhagen document would further enhance the transparency of the election process.

After the first round, concerns were raised regarding potential misuse of Voter Cards. The ODIHR Election Observation Mission welcomes steps taken to address these concerns and received no formal complaints of such irregularities.

The Election Law does not stipulate a deadline for the withdrawal of candidates. If a second round candidate were to withdraw late in the process, the electoral authorities would potentially face serious technical and administrative problems. The CEC recognised this fact and allowed the printing of two alternative ballot papers in addition to the 'official' ballot paper. Fortunately, neither of the alternative ballot papers was required, and all polling stations received the correct ballot papers. However, specifying a suitable deadline would lessen the potential for confusion, would provide a substitute candidate time to campaign, and would give the media an opportunity to increase voter awareness.

## **The Media and Election Campaign**

The election campaign was again conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere.

The election law provides clear rules regarding campaigning in the public and privately owned electronic media. Voters had access to a wide range of media outlets and could form their own opinion from information provided by a broad spectrum of media.

- The ODIHR Election Observation Mission found that the coverage of the election by the public TV channels during the official campaign period between the two rounds was balanced and offered the same amount of airtime to both candidates. Public Television also broadcast voter information.
- However, on 27 May, during the campaign silence period, Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda addressed voters on STV to encourage the electorate to vote. Whilst he did not mention any of the candidates by name, parts of the address had a partisan tone, and as such could be interpreted as a violation of the campaign silence.
- During the second campaign period, the news broadcasts of TV Markiza provided a more balanced coverage of the two candidates than in the first round. However, the Council of the Slovak Republic for Radio and TV Broadcasting again fined the privately owned TV station for breaking the election law during a specific programme.
- News items in some of the main newspapers on election day might be interpreted as a violation of the campaign silence.

## **Election Day**

The electoral authorities discharged their duties in an efficient and commendable manner. The ODIHR Election Observation Mission welcomes the high turnout.

The election commissions had a multi-party composition, an important safeguard for transparency. It was encouraging to note that most commission members chose to continue to take part in the work of election commissions on all levels although their candidates were no longer on the ballot.

The ODIHR Election Observation Mission found that the 1999 election for the President of the Slovak Republic was held in accordance with the Slovak electoral provisions, and voting and counting procedures were carried out in accordance with OSCE commitments.

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Upon an invitation from the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs the ODIHR sent a Needs Assessment Mission to the Slovak Republic and established the Election Observation Mission on 19 April 1999. The Election Observation Mission is headed by Ms Siri Skåre, seconded by the Government of Norway

The ODIHR Election Observation Mission's assessment is based upon the reports of 12 core staff and long term observers and 45 Short Term Observers from 17 OSCE participating states for the first round and 30 Short Term Observers for the second round. During the second round on election day, observers visited approximately 360 polling stations in all 79 districts.

The ODIHR Election Observation Mission will continue monitoring the election until the process is completed. A final, more comprehensive report, including recommendations for further improvements, will be issued in approximately four weeks.

For further information please contact:

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