

Re-Run of the Presidential Election, Second Round Republic of Serbia, December 21, 1997

Introduction

In its Final Report on the Parliamentary and Presidential elections held on 21 September and 5 October of this year, the OSCE concluded that the overall election process was fundamentally flawed. The Preliminary Statement on the first round of the re-run of the Presidential elections on 7 December 1997 referred back to this report and to the 1996 Gonzalez Report. It concluded that many of the serious recommendations of these reports had still not been properly addressed. The Republic Election Commission (REC) has, however, committed itself to endorse certain recommendations. However, these stated intentions have still not been acted upon in any concrete manner.

Based upon the earlier findings of the OSCE during the 1997 election process. The Technical Assessment Mission has continued to follow the key election issues, focusing on the election administration and emphasising the recommendations made during earlier rounds.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the main recommendations of the Gonzalez report was to establish a dialogue between all political forces in the country in order to create an environment where all parties should be able to have confidence in the democratic process leading up to and following the elections, as well as in the electoral system and the election contest itself. Such a broad dialogue has not yet taken place.

The majority of the shortcomings from the first round are still present, either due to too short time for implementation of improvements or due to a lack of will that could result in adequate short term measures to correct the situation. Some of the more important issues include, but are not limited to, the following issues:

- As part of the assessment of the first round of the election on 7 December the OSCE observers reported that two polling stations did not open on election day (Election Unit No. 26, the municipality of Vitina, Polling Stations 4 and 5). Despite that fact, results from these polling stations have been tabulated showing close to 100% turnout and close to 100% votes in favour of Mr. Milutinovic. The OSCE expects the REC to take measures to investigate not only these two polling stations but the whole electoral process in Kosovo.
- During this second round of the election further examples of polling stations that were not opened have been reported by our observers in Kosovo. There have also been reports on disputes on the access of party representatives into polling stations in Kosovo and these events accentuate the need to look much more carefully into measures for securing the transparency and the integrity of the process, so that trust between political actors can be enhanced.

- The Republic Election Commission has expressed a commitment to make the full tabulation of detailed results per polling station available to the public and interested political parties. This has yet to be done, and OSCE will re-emphasise the importance of this measure to be carried out within a reasonable time frame to secure transparency of the process.
- The Republic Election Commission has further expressed a will to provide a framework for accrediting domestic observers in future election. The events of this last round of elections show the urgent need to set up a framework for proper accreditation of non-partisan domestic observers.
- It is also stated that the Republic Election Commission realised the importance of stamping each ballot issued to voters with a unique stamp of each polling station in order to control the flow of ballot papers
- The media situation remains largely unchanged. The Osservatorio di Pavia¹ found that the State Television news programmes showed a clear bias towards Mr. Milutinovic. He enjoyed a considerable advantage over Mr. Seselj both in quantitative and qualitative terms. A similar study conducted by the European Institute for the Media confirms this conclusion. The European Institute for the Media's study of Studio B showed that this station, which is linked to the City Council of Belgrade, broadcasted mainly negative coverage of both candidates, without giving a clear preference to either of them. The privately owned BK Telecom presented generally balanced reporting on both, but showed a partiality in terms of total coverage of the candidate of the left coalition.
- The voter registers are still not sufficiently and regularly cross-checked against reliable citizens registers to avoid inaccuracies.

The OSCE expects that the recommendations issued during the whole election process are being addressed seriously on a technical level. The OSCE will also re-iterate the need to initiate a dialogue involving all main parliamentarian and non-parliamentarian political parties, with the aim to establish a broad consensus on the electoral process. Serious attempts should be made to improve the political environment and to instil confidence in the democratic process in such a way that the general participation of the parties and the electorate will be enhanced. The OSCE stands ready to assist in these issues.

Finally, the OSCE wished to acknowledge the co-operation of the Republic Election Commission throughout this mission.

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Upon receipt of an official invitation on August 14 to the OSCE Chairman-in-Office from the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the SOCE observed the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections on 21 September and

¹ As part of the OSCE Technical Assessment Mission the Osservatorio di Pavia has conducted a media monitoring mission, with full coverage of two State television channels during the two rounds of this election.

5 October 1997, and established a Technical Assessment Mission for the 7 December and 21 December re-run of the Presidential election.

Mr. Kare Vollan was appointed as the overall Co-ordinator for the mission during the second round upon being seconded by the Government of Norway, and Mr. Nikolai Vulchanov (ODIHR Election Adviser) served as the Technical Co-ordinator. Thirteen Election Experts were deployed at central and regional level to observe the legal and administrative aspects of his election process and were willing to provide advice upon request.

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