



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

**INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER MISSION-RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

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**ELECTION FOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

**SECOND ROUND OF VOTING**

**FINAL STATEMENT OF THE OSCE/ODIHR OBSERVER MISSION**

**INTRODUCTION**

On 15<sup>th</sup> March 1996, Dr N. T. Ryabov, Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation issued to Ambassador Audrey Glover, the Director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the formal invitation to co-ordinate the international observers at the Presidential election. On 1<sup>st</sup> April the OSCE / ODIHR sent the Note Verbale to all 54 participating States of the OSCE requesting them to send observers. Michael Meadowcroft was appointed to act as Co-ordinator and , from the end of April, the long-term observers began to take up their positions in the regions of Russian. The OSCE / ODIHR has established six regional offices: in Irkutsk, Kazan, Khabarovsk, Novosibirsk, St. Petersburg and Stabropol. A central office was established in Moscow and, with assistance from the European Union, logistical and information services were provided,

By polling day in the first round of voting, some five hundred international observers had been deployed across the Russian Federation. Other observers also monitored the election, some of whom participated in the reporting back sessions which preceded the Statement on the first round. Approximately four hundred observers were able to return for the second round of voting. Observers were deployed right across Russia, and though there was still a disproportionate number in and around Moscow and St. Petersburg, the geographical imbalance was less than at the elections of 1993 and 1995. Every observer was encouraged to contribute to the consideration of the Final Statement on the election and to participate in report-back meetings in each region and in Moscow. The OSCE/ ODIRH is confident that this Final Statement represents the considered views of the International Observer Mission.

**THE LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK**

We commented in our Final Statement on the first round that, given the scale and particular difficulties of the country, the electoral laws and the Central Electoral Commission's regulations were, in principle, sufficient to provide a secure legal framework for the conduct of

the election. We are still satisfied that this remains that case, however we express our concern at the possible abuse of the system of “green certificates” enabling an elector to register up to the last minute in a different polling district. We are also particularly concerned at the CEC decision, taken after the first round of voting, which extended this provision still further and permitted voting without certificates purely by order of the local electoral commission. In our opinion this process lacked sufficient safeguards against multiple voting.

We draw particular attention below to the serious problems with the behaviour of the mass media and we believe that there is a definite need for clearer laws to ensure fair treatment of candidates, particularly on television, together with more rigorous enforcement of the existing laws.

There is a further deficiency in the electoral law, in those sections relating to financial accountability. It negates considerably the proper intention of the law, and the wishes of the Central Election Commission, if funds can be spent without any inhibition or limitation on behalf of a candidate by a separate organisation.

We are satisfied that the four levels of electoral commissions, from polling station to territorial and subject levels and, finally, the Central Electoral Commission, each with the opportunity for all registered candidates and recognises groups to have non-voting members, provides in principle an effective structure for the administration of elections. It would be worth looking again at the basis of appointment of polling station commissions. It is worth recording that approximately one million people are involved in conducting the Russian electoral process, in the vast majority of cases with commendable efficiency, often based on experience gained from four previous elections. With few exceptions, the commissions welcomed international observers and assisted them in their observation.

## **THE MEDIA**

The OSCE / ODIHR observer mission has benefited from the expert monitoring carried out by the European Institute for the Media, from whom a separate report is available. The Institute’s clear conclusion that there was a significant imbalance in President Yeltsin’s favour within the media, particularly in terms of television coverage, is a serious comment on the ultimate fairness of the electoral process. The bias of the television coverage was not only demonstrated in the quantity of coverage of the candidates but also in the way they and their campaigns were depicted. Long-term observers reported that this tendency was replicated in the regions. The impotence of the Central Electoral Commission in enforcing its own resolutions showed both a lack of will on its members’ part and also a need to strengthen the CEC’s powers in relation to media regulation during the period of the election campaign.

Circumstantially it is possible to demonstrate the electoral benefit of sympathetic media exposure by noting the late rise in Alexander Lebed’s first round vote at a time when it is acknowledged that President Yeltsin’s campaign managers decided to enhance his television coverage.

Despite drawing attention to the seriousness of the media situation in the OSCE / ODIHR Final Statement on the first round of voting, little or nothing appears to have been done to improve the situation for the second round.

## **CANDIDATES' RESOURCES AND SUPPORT**

Our general views on the imbalance of financial resources in favour of President Yeltsin, the actions of some public officials in support of this candidature, and the apparent misuse of his presidential position, often through the actions of local administration, were detailed in our statement on the first round of voting and we reiterate them here in order to make clear our concern that the erosion of electoral fairness in these ways continues. For instance, observers in Tatarstan and Mordova found representatives of the local administration present within the polling station. Also in Tatarstan there was evidence of intimidation with local officials threatening to cut off gas supplies in rural areas if people did not vote for President Yeltsin. In Bahkortostan local administration officials were instructed by representatives of the President to secure a better result for President Yeltsin – with thinly veiled threats on their jobs.

In Moscow, the city council put pressure on shops and restaurants in the city centre to display posters which, through ostensibly aimed at increasing voter turnout, were thinly veiled pro-Yeltsin propaganda.

## **POLLING DAY**

Observers noted a number of infringements of the electoral law and of the regulations but their general impression was of some improvement between the two rounds of voting and that, although each infringement is serious in itself, they did not collectively materially affect the outcome of the election.

The detailed observer reporting forms for the first round showed that approximately two thirds of all polling stations had observers from at least two candidates. In a number of cases they were absent from polling stations which had had them in the first round. This is of concern to international observers but it may indicate a greater confidence in the integrity of the electoral administration. Observers noted that many candidates' observers were very passive and suggested that training as to their role would be beneficial.

There is again widespread criticism of the lack of secrecy when many individual electoral voters. The continued provision of desks, together with pens, in the open area of a number of polling stations suggests that the vital concept and purpose of secret voting have not yet been appreciated. Such provision actually encourages voters to avoid using the booths. In some cases there is a direct correlation between the lack of sufficient polling booths and the prevalence of voting in the open. It is perhaps indicative of the Russian peoples' confidence in their post-Soviet democracy that so few voters appear concerned at the lack of secrecy. Nonetheless, the principle of secret voting is vital. And observers wish to state their strong view that the physical arrangements of polling stations, the design and number of voting booths, need to be improved and coupled with a firm lead from the electoral commissions in order to resolve this problem.

An associated problem is that of "family voting", that is husband and wife, sometimes with other members of the family obtaining their ballot papers, then discussing and voting collectively, often in the open. Very occasionally men were observed signing for two ballots. As with the issue of secrecy, there is currently little obvious opposition to the practice, but within the context of individual civil rights, and particularly of women's rights, it is at odds with accepted standards of democratic practice.

Observers make the point that infractions of the law and regulations are not always seen as such by the local electoral commissions and suggest that a training programme would help to improve the situation for the future.

A particular problem was reported from St. Petersburg where a number of Russians from the Baltic States had come to the city in order to vote but none were allowed to do so.

Whilst it is undoubtedly legitimate for an electoral commission to seek to encourage the highest possible turnout of voters, the situation in Russia between the two rounds of election inevitably brought the CEC's work in this regard into the political arena. The view that a high turnout would benefit President Yeltsin was unchallenged, and observers state their belief that some steps taken by the CEC to boost the turnout were excessive. The choice of a mid-week day for polling, the blanking out of television screens in favour of exhortation to vote, the extension of absentee voting without certificates, the inauguration of new polling stations at stations and airports at the last moment, are particular examples.

In general the use of mobile boxes was in accordance with the law, but in Tver for instance, there was some evidence of their over-enthusiastic use – including their use in what were in effect new polling places at stations and airports.

Observers were pleased to note the continuing improvement in access to polling stations in prisons and military establishments, although there are still a few where observers were prevented from monitoring voting. The voting process was generally satisfactory in institutions but there were a few reports of staff or relatives putting pressure on elections to vote in a particular way in homes for elderly or mentally frail.

The moratorium on campaigning was generally observed but a handful of instances of minor campaigning for President Yeltsin was reported.

Observers noted a general improvement in the counting and tabulation process, compared with the first round, although there was a continuing problem with access to some Territorial Electoral Commissions, particularly in Tatarstan. Only in Astrakhan was a serious infraction of the rules reported. There the first copy of the results protocol was completed in pencil and the other two copies left blank. After checking at the Territorial Commission the three copies were then completed in ink. This is said to be common in the region. Observers noted that results of the first round had not been published in each area and called for this to be checked by the CEC.

Observers noted the remarkable turnaround of electoral support for the two candidates in the four republics: Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Mordovia and Tatarstan, and requests the CEC to undertake an enquiry whether or not there is evidence of irregularities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The OSCE ODIHR Observer Mission believes that the declared result of the election accurately reflects the wishes of the Russian electoral on the day, and congratulates the voters of the Russian Federation for participating in a further consolidation of the democratic process in the Russian Federation.

In the opinion of the OSCE ODIHR Observers the concerns detailed above in relation to polling day, though serious in themselves, did not materially affect the outcome of the ballot;

The OSCE ODIHR Observer Mission believes that the imbalance of media coverage and of resources available to candidates, and the role of some parts of the Presidential administration during the campaign period, marred an otherwise effective and efficient electoral process.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The OSCE ODIHR Observer Mission wishes to pay tribute to the work of the members of the electoral commissions and in particular again to place on record its appreciation of the help and co-operation it has received from the Central Electoral Commission and from the Commission in the regions and districts in which it has worked.

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OSCE/ODIHR International Observers Mission  
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