



PERMANENT MISSION OF IRELAND TO THE OSCE

PC.DEL/985/07
18 October 2007

ROTENTURMSTRASSE 16-18
1010 VIENNA

ENGLISH only

Tel: +43 1 715 76 98 26
Fax: + 43 1 715 57 55
Ireland-OSCE@dfa.ie

Permanent Council, 18 October 2007

ODIHR Report on the Parliamentary Elections in Ireland

Mr. Chairman,

In accordance with our commitments under the Copenhagen Document, the Government of Ireland invited ODIHR to observe the general election, which was held on 24 May this year. On the basis of the findings of a Needs Assessment Mission, ODIHR decided to send an Election Assessment Mission to observe the election itself and the electoral process. The final report of that mission was published on 11 September. I would like to take this opportunity to share some comments on the report and the assessment process with the Permanent Council.

The executive summary of the report contains the following comment “Overall, the 24 May elections to the Dáil Éireann reflected a stable democratic tradition in the conduct of elections in Ireland. Irish voters, political parties and candidates expressed a high level of confidence in the election administration and the entire process.” This is obviously a source of satisfaction to the Government of Ireland and to all those involved in the electoral process. However, we have also taken note of the suggestions made by ODIHR for technical and legislative improvements in our election process. These are being carefully studied by the relevant Irish authorities.

Some of the matters to which the ODIHR report draws attention had already been the subject of comment during the general election campaign and in the Irish media. In fact, a number of the issues raised are already addressed in the Programme for Government agreed by the parties which formed a coalition in late July, under the heading of electoral reform. Under the programme, the Government is committed to the establishment of a new Electoral Commission which will be charged, among other tasks, with improvements in the maintenance of the electoral register and examining the question of financing the political system. The relevant Irish authorities will maintain contact with ODIHR to inform them about action taken on foot of the report and other improvements in the electoral system, which may be introduced.

Mr. Chairman,

No electoral system is so perfect that it is incapable of improvement and to have the possibilities for development pointed out publicly by international observers can be a challenging and at times uncomfortable experience. It can, however, also be a real stimulus for improvement. Ireland prides itself on being a mature, established democracy with an unbroken tradition of electoral probity. We are confident that our systems meet the highest international standards and that is broadly the conclusion reached by ODIHR. However, we are not so complacent or proud that we are unwilling to draw lessons from the vast experience and skill which ODIHR bring to its responsibilities. Our respect for ODIHR and our unqualified support for its electoral work throughout the OSCE area are too great. We

welcomed the decision of ODIHR to assess our parliamentary elections and we welcomed the report, including those parts which highlighted possibilities for improvement. On balance, the presence and activities of the Election Assessment Mission was a positive experience both for Ireland and for ODIHR.

I should like to finish by urging all other participating States to profit from ODIHR's expertise by living up to their Copenhagen commitments to the fullest extent, in both the spirit and the letter.

Thank you.