



OFFICE FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION MISSION IN BULGARIA

21 April 1997

**STATEMENT OF THE OSCE / ODIHR INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS
MISSION**

BULGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

19 APRIL 1997

Following an invitation to send an Observer Mission from H.E. President Peter Stoyanov, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) appointed Mr Simon Osborn (UK) as Co-ordinator and Mr Mark Power-Stevens as Deputy Co-ordinator for the Mission. The Observation Mission was established in Bulgaria on 10 March 1997. The ODIHR also appointed Mr. Eugenio Polizzi (Italy), one of the ODIHR Election Advisors, as the Mission's Legal Officer.

Six long term observers were nominated by OSCE Participating States: Ms Marit Pettersen (Norway), Ms Christina Danielson (Sweden), Mr Paul Dixelius (Sweden), Mr Ulrich Buchsenschutz (Germany), Mr Andre Beyler (France) and Mr Jean Flammand (France). The OSCE / ODIHR Observation Mission deployed its long-term observers throughout the country to monitor the election preparations and the campaign.

A further 91 International Observers from 25 OSCE Participating States were deployed by the Mission on election day. These states included: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Finland, FYROM, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovakia, Turkey, UK and USA. These observers were deployed throughout the country on Election Day to follow voting, counting and the aggregation of the results in all 31 electoral districts.

Despite some difficulties due to an outdated legal framework, those responsible for administering the election performed their duties thoroughly and professionally. Polling procedures on election day were carried out for the most part in a very efficient manner. The Central Election Commission (CEC), in particular, should be commended for administering an election process according to a law that is clearly out of date.

It is a matter of some concern that the appropriate political response to amend the election law was not forthcoming, and the Central Election Commission was forced to make ad hoc decisions to bring the outdated legislation in line with its practical implementation.

The composition of the election commissions proved to be a point of contention during the election period. In most cases where the political parties had complained about the composition of the Section Election Commissions (SECs) the District Election Commission (DEC) took action to ensure that *no party* had a majority on them. This problem was mainly the result of the election law which sets the date for the formation of SECs five days before the final day for registration of coalitions and parties contesting the election.

It is worth noting that the campaign was conducted in a tolerant manner and most parties exercised restraint throughout the period of the election.

The substantial issue of the division of parties into different categories proved to be the most contentious issue in the pre-election period. A total of five parties were allotted category A status. The criteria for selecting these parties was extended for these elections to include parties represented in parliament and also one party with standing in a number of public opinion polls. These parties enjoyed some advantages over those in category B including the allotment of prime time on Bulgarian National Television and Radio and the allocation of a limited amount of state funds. Understandably this was of particular concern for those parties in category B. Clearly this issue will need to be addressed in the future.

A further point raised with the Observation Mission concerned the allocation of colours for ballot papers. Few parties were satisfied with the system. Every party expressed their desire to move away from the system and to adopt a plain white ballot for all parties similar to those used for the Presidential ballot last November.

Bulgarian National Television and Radio in particular continue to be the main source of information for most Bulgarians. Despite obvious economic pressures on both these institutions they performed their duties in line with the regulations. All parties made extensive use of the private media to get their message across.

The OSCE / ODIHR would like to note the substantial contribution to confidence and transparency in the election process made by domestic observers, particularly those civic organisations that have again conducted their civic duties in a professional manner.

The OSCE / ODIHR Observation Mission concludes that the election was conducted generally in line with the OSCE commitments. However anomalies in the election legislation will have to be addressed before future elections.

Those recommendations that may improve the process will be addressed in the final the ODIHR report, which will be presented to the OSCE Chairman-in-Office shortly.