



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Of the second round of the Presidential Election In the Republic of Montenegro 19th October 1997

The OSCE Election Observation mission maintained a strong presence for the Second Round of this election. During the two rounds, the Observation Mission continued an in-depth observation and closely followed all election-related developments. The deployment plan was designed to ensure a wide and representative coverage by international teams of observers representing 15 OSCE participating States. On polling day, observers covered one fourth of the 879 polling stations in most municipalities and many polling stations were visited more than once. The counting and tabulation processes were also followed.

OSCE Observation Mission conclusions:

The Observation Mission has concluded that the preliminary results of the Election reflect the will of the Electorate in the Republic of Montenegro.

Registration of Voters has been the main issue at this election. The Registers used on 5th October contained many errors and omissions. Citizens whose entries appeared in the Municipality Register were omitted from the Polling Station extracts; many citizens were wrongly omitted from any Municipality Register, many entries in Registers were incorrect by reason of spelling errors, etc., and many electors who had reached the qualifying age were omitted. It is encouraging to note that measures were taken in an attempt to improve the completeness and accuracy of the Municipality registers in time for the Second Round on 19th October. The Supreme Court, the Ministry of Justice and the Secretariats in the Municipalities are to be commended for undertaking such a difficult task by processing many registration appeals up to 48 hours before polling day. This enabled many citizens to exercise their right to vote. We would emphasise that one of the key words central to democratic tradition is “universality” and this is understood to secure access to an effective, impartial and non-discriminatory registration procedure. All citizens who have reached the qualifying age on polling day, and who are otherwise qualified, should be given the right to vote. Polling day findings clearly revealed the need to improve the Registration process in Montenegro. A review of the fragmented arrangements for compiling the Registers is urgently required. There is a need for detailed regulations with overall responsibility and control by a competent body for compiling and computerising a central Register with the required measures for publication, claims appeals and a high level of transparency.

The complete independence and impartiality of the Election Administration is essential to the legitimacy and credibility of the electoral process. The integrity of the process can only be upheld by well-trained and competent Election Commissions and Polling Station Committees. This was the case during the second round with full representation and participation particularly on election bodies by the representatives of the candidates, especially at polling station level. Each member has the right to have his or her complaint recorded in the Polling Station Record and with the further right to refuse to sign the Record. The full participation of candidates' representatives was the essential safeguard to ensure fairness and transparency.

An election process in any country may be subject to imperfections and infractions and Montenegro is no exception. Generally the election at polling station level was well conducted. There were difficulties of administration, particularly with the late introduction of the safeguard of additional Register extracts for recording the electors' signatures at the polling station. This additional measure led to long queues at many polling stations and a delay in the close of poll. However the election was held in an atmosphere of peace and calm, and it is important to note the high turnout of around 73%.

Any unnecessary delay in publication of results, either in part, or as a whole, could seriously erode confidence in this election process. It is imperative that the competing political interests, the media and particularly the citizens be kept fully informed at this crucial stage of the final result tabulation. It is of concern therefore that despite the early conclusion of the procedures at Municipal Election Commission level, and the submission of Reports by those bodies to the Republican Election Commission, there has been a lack of communication and in turn a lack of transparency on the part of the Republican Election Commission as regards the final results.

The OSCE will remain to observe the verification and publication of the final result. A detailed report will be submitted shortly to the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

For further information, please contact: Jan EDOY, OSCE Co-ordinator in Montenegro or after the close of the Mission: ODIHR/OSCE, Krucza 36/Wspolna 6, 00-522 Warsaw, Poland. Tel: 48 22 625 70 40 / Fax: 48 22 625 43 57.

Podgorica, 21st October 1997.