



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

Presidential Election, Georgia – 4 January 2004

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Tbilisi, 5 January 2004 - The International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) for the 4 January extraordinary presidential election in Georgia is a joint undertaking of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament (EP).

This preliminary statement is issued prior to the tabulation and announcement of official election results and before election day complaints and appeals have been addressed. A complete and final analysis of the election process will be offered in the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The 4 January 2004 extraordinary presidential election in Georgia demonstrated notable progress over previous elections, and brought the country closer to meeting international commitments and standards for democratic elections.

The authorities generally displayed the collective political will to conduct democratic elections, especially compared to the 2 November 2003 parliamentary elections that were characterized by systematic and widespread fraud. Nevertheless, due to the short timeframe available for the organization of the election and the lack of a truly competitive political environment, the forthcoming parliamentary elections will be a more genuine indicator of Georgia's commitment to a democratic election process.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) made commendable efforts to administer this election in a credible and professional manner, although the time constraints limited the scope of administrative improvements. CEC decisions that had to be undertaken in order to deliver an election within these constraints were deemed necessary, but not desirable as precedents for the permanent administration of elections in Georgia. The establishment of a new voter register in this context is notable for contributing to enhanced public confidence in the election process. Given the many challenges faced by the election administration, election officials should be recognized for their diligent efforts under difficult conditions.

However, the political imbalance in the composition of the election administration at all levels, as well as the failure of some District Election Commissions (DEC's) and Precinct Election Commissions (PEC's) to maintain appropriate distance from participants in the election process, caused serious concern. Similarly, misuse of administrative resources in certain instances, indicated an ongoing lack of distinction between state administrative and party structures.

The IEOM notes the following positive elements that distinguished this election from previous elections:

- Improvements to both the legislative framework and the administration of the voting process;
- Enhanced transparency, professionalism and openness of the CEC;
- Commendable efforts to improve the voter lists;
- A high degree of freedom of expression enjoyed by the media, except in Adjara;
- A largely peaceful and free pre-election period, although there was little active campaigning;
- Resolution of the few cases heard by the CEC and courts within the legal deadlines and without obvious bias;
- Efforts made to increase the participation of national minorities in the elections, including the printing of bilingual ballot papers;

However, some aspects of the process need to be addressed in order to remedy issues of concern and continue forward progress, including:

- The continuing lack of a clear separation between State administration and political party structures, and the ongoing potential for abuse of state administration resources;
- The political imbalance in the composition of the election administration at all levels, and the failure of some DEC's and PEC's to maintain an appropriate distance from some participants in the election process created, at a minimum, the perception of a lack of impartiality and independence of the election administration;
- The incompleteness and inaccuracies in the voter register;

The lack of commitment by the authorities of Adjara to guarantee sufficient conditions for the conduct of a meaningful democratic election in that area;

- Less scrutiny by domestic observers in both the pre-election period and on election day.

On election day, the voting was conducted in a generally spirited and calm atmosphere. The turnout was unusually high, and PEC's processed the high number of voters in a relatively efficient manner. Election day registration occurred in most polling stations, and the identity and residency requirements were scrupulously checked. However, the inking of voters as an anti-fraud measure was devalued due to inconsistent application, increasing the risk of multiple voting. The atmosphere during the vote count was generally positive with no significant disturbances or unrest, although a large number of unauthorized persons were reported present. However, in Kvemo Kartli, past irregularities including ballot stuffing and tampering with protocols were reported.

With regard to the forthcoming parliamentary elections, a summary of recommendations that the IEOM would urge the authorities to act upon include:

- Ensure that administrative resources are not abused and therefore guarantee equal conditions for all parties;
- Provide equal media access for all parties in order that the electorate is kept informed of all political choices;

- Ensure that opposition political parties are adequately represented in election commissions at all levels, in order to increase public confidence in the process and promote transparency;
- Immediately commence the computerization, consolidation and centralization of the voter register;
- Continue a dialogue with the local authorities in Adjara to guarantee an environment more conducive to a meaningful democratic contest, including issues of voter registration, media access, equal conditions for parties, and securing the basic political right for parties and candidates to convey their message to the electorate;
- Guarantee that internal reforms of the election administration proceed quickly, and especially at the CEC, and ensure a professional Secretariat for effective administrative support;
- Ensure the uniform implementation of the marking (inking) of voters, in order that this important anti-fraud mechanism is not devalued due to inconsistent application;
- Sustain efforts to ensure comprehensive training of election officials, particularly on vote count and tabulation procedures, in order to enhance professional standards and guarantee uniform implementation of the legal requirements and administrative regulations;
- Uphold the integrity of the democratic election process in Georgia, by continuing to hold any persons responsible for violations of election related laws fully accountable;
- Further efforts to increase national minority participation and understanding of the election process through the production of both ballots and result protocols in minority languages;
- Ensure that a realistic timetable be established in order for the above recommendations to be seriously and sufficiently addressed.

A more comprehensive list of recommendations concentrating on the longer term issues to be addressed will be included in the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on this election process.

The institutions represented in the IEOM stand ready to assist the Georgian authorities to address shortcomings in their electoral process, and support their efforts to correct outstanding issues in order to hold genuinely democratic parliamentary elections that are fully compatible with Georgia's membership within OSCE and Council of Europe, and in accordance with other European standards.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background

The 4 January 2004 extraordinary presidential election was the fourth since independence in 1991. It was widely viewed as a test for the newly installed authorities to demonstrate their level of commitment to the democratic election process.

This election took place against the backdrop of the 2 November 2003 parliamentary elections, marred by a lack of political will by the governmental authorities to organize a genuine democratic election process, which resulted in widespread and systematic election fraud. In addition to the disenfranchisement of potentially significant numbers of voters, serious irregularities took place in polling stations, including ballot stuffing, use of pre-marked ballots, multiple voting and destruction of

ballot boxes. After the close of polls and during the tabulation process, some election officials were directly involved in producing dishonest election results.

These failures provoked a political crisis, street protests, and an atmosphere of instability, leading to the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze on 23 November. Nino Burjanadze, the former Speaker of Parliament, became Interim President and called for an extraordinary presidential election within the constitutional deadline. A government restructuring took place with Zurab Zhvania appointed as State Minister. Eight out of nine regional governors resigned and were replaced by National Movement and Burjanadze-Democrat supporters.

On 25 November, the Supreme Court annulled the results of the proportional component of the 2 November 2003 parliamentary elections. In contradiction to this decision, the majoritarian component of these elections was inexplicably permitted to stand. The partial cancellation of the election results meant that 58 elected Members of Parliament did not take their seats and the Parliament elected in November 1999 was reconvened. As a further consequence, four re-runs and 11 second round majoritarian elections were held on 4 January. The date for the re-run of the proportional contest remains uncertain.

The political environment shifted dramatically in the run up to the presidential election, as the parties that had led the November events -- the National Movement and the Burjanadze-Democrats -- consolidated their executive power. In stark contrast, the pro-Shevardnadze parliamentary coalition For New Georgia (FNG) dissolved, and the once dominant Citizens Union of Georgia (CUG) appeared to no longer function as a political party. Several previously influential parties, including the Labor Party, New Rights, and the Revival Party, lost some level of support by distancing themselves from the November events. The Labor Party and Revival announced an intention to boycott the presidential election.

The participation of Adjara in this election remained uncertain until 29 December. Even after the decision, conditions were not in place for the conduct of a meaningful democratic election process. Regrettably, as in previous elections, the presidential election did not take place in Abkhazia and most of South Ossetia.

The international community provided significant funding and technical assistance for the presidential election, mainly through the OSCE Election Assistance Program. Although donor assistance arrived relatively late in the election process, it has provided a crucial contribution to realizing this election. The Georgian authorities expressed their appreciation for the financial support by participating States, a part of which enabled the timely transfer of funds to cover salaries of election officials.

Legal Framework

The election was conducted according to a combination of general and transitional provisions of the Unified Election Code (UEC), which provides an improved framework for democratic elections. Amendments passed on 29 November were assessed as improvements. These included the simplification of complaint procedures, and the universal use of voter marking (inking) to limit double voting, rather than limiting this safeguard to urban areas only as during the November election.

Nonetheless, there were considerable uncertainties regarding the applicable legal framework, as the transitional provisions foresaw neither an extraordinary presidential election nor a new voter registration. This resulted in incongruities, and normal timeframes such as those related to the general voters' list, were impossible to meet. Significantly, transitional provisions concerning the political balance on electoral administration, seemed unsuited to the changed political circumstances.

Despite these ambiguities, the UEC was generally adhered to – either in letter or in spirit. However, there were exceptions. On 30 December, the CEC adopted an ordinance that permitted each DEC to create a special reserve of people who could assist PECs on election day. The stated intention was to ensure PEC quorums and proper administration in the event of PEC boycotts or the additional workload due to same day registration. Nevertheless, the legal basis for this measure remains dubious, and no procedures or safeguards were adopted to prevent abuses.

On 26 December, the Constitutional Court ruled as admissible a case alleging that certain elements of the UEC concerning voter registration are in conflict with the Constitution. As an interim measure, pending final resolution of the case, the Court suspended application of these provisions. This removed – at least for the time being - the legal obstacle to the conduct of same-day registration of voters.

The Constitution requires a 50% voter turnout and that the winning candidate receives 50% of the ballots cast. Because of the extraordinary registration, including same day registration, the total number of registered voters was not known before the date of elections. However, in both cases the CEC did not issue a formal decision before the election, in order to clarify the basis upon which these thresholds would be calculated.

Election Administration

The election was administered by a three-tiered election administration: the CEC, 75 District Election Commissions (DECs), and 2,850 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs).

On 30 November, Zurab Chiaberashvili, formerly Executive Director of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), was appointed as the new CEC Chair. This followed the resignation of the former Chairperson, Nana Devdariani.

The Interim President exercised the right to appoint the five CEC presidential appointees, and consequently 10 of the 15 members were supporters of the newly restructured government. Although pragmatism may have prevailed in this approach due to the disintegration of the former governing party (CUG), the spirit of the CEC formula negotiated in July, whose objective was to form a politically balanced CEC, was again not respected.

The CEC generally adhered to the law and functioned in a professional, open, and transparent manner. It demonstrated greater political will than its predecessors to conduct a democratic election. Its performance was a notable improvement over previous elections. It should be commended for its effort to increase the professionalism of election officials, by conducting training sessions in close co-

operation with various international organizations, although there remained a clear lack of understanding in particular regarding completing the protocols.

However, the visible failure of some DEC's and PEC's to maintain an appropriate distance from some participants in the election process created, at a minimum, the perception of a lack of impartiality and independence on the part of the election administration. For instance, observers reported that Saakashvili campaign staff worked in close co-operation with the DEC and PEC personnel. National Movement and the Burjanadze-Democrat campaign staffers provided material resources (Isani, Samgori, Tskaltubo, Tkibuli), training (Chughureti), campaign literature (Liakhvi, Gori, Lagodekhi) and allegedly assisted PECs carry out registration. In a few instances, district campaign coordinators also served as election commission staff (Liakhvi, Gori, Dusheti).

The mid-level commissions underwent major personnel changes based upon past performance. In 49 districts, DEC chairs formally resigned and a total of 331 DEC members were dismissed. Most changes affected the five presidential appointees. In a few cases DEC chairs did not go voluntarily. In Terjola, the DEC chair who previously had performed professionally, was forced to resign by the newly appointed local authorities. Notably, none of the six DEC chairs in Adjara resigned or were dismissed despite the falsifications reported during the last elections. Observers reported that generally the DEC's performed their duties in an orderly, transparent and efficient manner, however, there were some notable exceptions including Saburtalo, Isani, Gori, Akhalkalaki, Kharagauli, Batumi, Kobuleti and Khelvachauri.

The changes in PEC composition reflected a similar pattern as the higher level commissions, with a dominance of commission members from the National Movement and Burjanadze-Democrats appointed in the run-up to the elections. Despite many newly appointed personnel, PEC's appeared to work in a collegial manner and with diligence. However, many commissions would benefit from additional training, especially in vote count and tabulation procedures.

Voter Registration

The central voter register used for the 2003 parliamentary elections was the subject of intense criticism. The CEC was faced with two less than ideal choices - address the many problems associated with the existing register; or create a new list. Neither approach could possibly produce a complete and accurate list by 4 January.

On 9 December, following an open debate and close vote, the CEC opted for a new registration. The decision, based on the premise that public confidence in the old lists was too damaged to conduct a credible election, can be justified as reasonable under the circumstances.

The public information campaign concerning registration got off to a slow start, but gathered significant momentum. Although most citizens in urban areas were aware of the process, and had a basic understanding of how it worked, those from rural communities and areas of non-Georgian majority were less knowledgeable.

The registration devolved the majority of tasks and responsibilities to PECs. Despite the late start in some localities, and significant resource and infrastructure challenges, PECs and DECAs were reported to have worked diligently on all aspects of registration. PECs, DECAs, local branches of the Ministry of Interior and other authorities, generally followed the law and CEC instructions. The election administration should be commended for their substantial efforts to improve public confidence on this important aspect of the election.

However, despite these efforts, the lists must be considered incomplete. A number of shortcomings raised concerns regarding accuracy and inclusiveness. Most seriously, difficulties proving current residence meant many citizens would have had to travel to places of past residence to avoid disenfranchisement. The voter list should be centralized and computerized as soon as possible.

Although verification safeguards did exist, the short timeframe limited measures to prevent multiple registrations. PECs were inconsistent in their application of the CEC rules, including concerning “family registration”. There were credible reports of officials illegally charging money for identity documents. In one case, in which the CEC directly intervened, offenders were publicly dismissed from office.

On December 30, the CEC decided to allow same-day registration of voters, including those abroad. The provision seemed reasonable in the circumstances of these elections, where voter registration was admittedly incomplete, but should not become a permanent feature. In some instances this caused long queues, but it rarely caused disorder.

In Adjara, there was regrettably no voter registration prior to elections. The voter turnout was very low.

Candidate Registration and the Campaign

Two political parties and five initiative groups succeeded to submit candidate support lists with a minimum of 50,000 signatures to the CEC before the 12 December deadline. One candidate, Igor Giorgadze, was denied registration for not meeting the residency requirement. The six remaining candidates were confirmed on 17 December (one candidate withdrew the day before the election). Two among the six ran in the 1995 and 2000 presidential elections and obtained less than 1% of the vote.

While the presidential election was a multi-candidate race, the political environment was not competitive. There was one clear frontrunner who dominated the political scene. Besides the National Movement and the Burjanadze Democrats none of the major political parties presented candidates. The new political environment and short timeframe may have discouraged several potential contenders from running. Regarding the majoritarian contests, no choice was offered to the electorate in 5 of the 11 second round contests, as a result of late withdrawals of candidates.

The campaign was extremely low-key, with a very small number of events organized throughout the country. Several candidates stated that they had insufficient funds to prepare campaign materials or organize events. The candidate recognized as the frontrunner focused on encouraging broad participation in registration and voting.

Observers reported that State administrative resources were at times used in support of one candidate. In contravention to the UEC, other candidates did not benefit similarly. In a few instances, Mr. Saakashvili's local campaign headquarters were established in State-owned premises (Kvareli, Kazbegi, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza, Shida Kartli region). National Movement and Burjanadze-Democrats campaign material and/or flags were at times displayed in public buildings (Gori, Karaleti, Akhalkalaki, Ambrolauri, Racha-Lechkhumi governor's building). Such examples underline the ongoing concern that there is a lack of distinct separation between the State administration and party structures, which has been a recurrent problem in past elections. Although these violations were not systematic and widespread, the authorities clearly must improve upon providing equal conditions for all candidates.

In contravention to the UEC, local authorities have remained in, or taken up posts, while at the same time running for parliamentary office. The newly appointed governor of Samtske-Javakheti, and the gangebali of Akhalkalaki, did not resign from their positions though they were candidates in the 4 January majoritarian contest. Observers in the Kvemo Kartli region, Sagarejo, Chugureti, Didube noted that local authorities were active in the registration process. In one instance (Gori: Tkviavi) PEC members were observed distributing pensions while registering voters.

The election campaign remained largely peaceful. Fears that substantial pre-election violence would overshadow the electoral process did not materialize. However, on 15 December an explosive device caused minor damage to the home of candidate T. Shashiashvili. The Georgian Ministers of State Security and Internal Affairs warned of threats against candidate M. Saakashvili. He was subsequently moved to living quarters within the Presidential Residence in Tbilisi. In the weeks leading to the elections five small explosions detonated in Tbilisi.

In Adjara, on 22 December, a student leader active in a Public Committee formed to advocate for the organization of the presidential election in the autonomous Republic, was physically assaulted by unknown men. Consequently, he had to be transported to Tbilisi for medical attention.

The Media

In the immediate aftermath of the November events, the media continued to enjoy a high degree of freedom of expression, except in Adjara. However, incidents of random violence on media outlets and restrictions on media in Adjara raised serious concern. For instance, a small bomb exploded in front of the State TV/Radio company and a rocket-propelled grenade hit Rustavi 2, the main private broadcaster. In Adjara, Rustavi 2 was taken off the air since the beginning of December, thus decreasing further the freedom of expression in the Autonomous Republic.

The absence of an active campaign and the tight timeframe was not conducive to comprehensive information on the election process. Both print and electronic media mainly focused on the candidacy of Mr. Saakashvili and government officials' activities. Other candidates were largely absent from the media. Unlike during the November elections, the media generally showed a greater degree of objectivity and a more critical approach. Significant coverage was devoted to the voter registration process through the CEC public service announcement campaign. In that respect, private media played a particularly active role.

State Media generally complied with the legal provisions on allocation of free of charge airtime. All the candidates used the opportunity to convey their message through this free airtime, although its effectiveness was reduced when transmitted outside TV prime time. Only the recognized frontrunner employed paid advertising. State TV 1 allocated 46% of total airtime to the President and the executive branch and 22% to National Movement. The coverage was generally positive and they were often given the opportunity to directly address the public through interviews.

The National Movement and the recognized frontrunner received the most coverage in the media, with some 27% of the total airtime in the most popular TV stations, of a mainly positive tone. In addition, 32% of the same total airtime -- of which 87% was positive -- was allocated to the President and the executive branch, which greatly improved the visibility of the current pro-governmental faction. In contrast, Adjara TV favored Revival Party and allocated 73% of positive space. It often gave negative coverage of the central authorities. Imedi TV gave the most balanced coverage of the campaign.

A similar picture emerged from the press with some 60% of the space devoted to Government officials, the National Movement and the Burjanadze-Democrats. Nevertheless, print media presented a generally larger spectrum of political views and covered the authorities more critically.

Election Disputes

Very few formal complaints were brought to either the court or the election commissions. This is in marked contrast to previous elections. It may relate to the limited campaigning and lack of competitive environment. Formal complaints received by the CEC in the pre-election period were less than 20 and mainly regard DEC appointments. The few cases heard by the CEC and courts were resolved within the legal deadlines and without obvious bias.

Gender issues

Men tend to dominate Georgian political life though several women, including the Interim President Nino Burjanadze, have risen to public prominence. There is only one female Minister in Government, appointed by Mrs. Burjanadze. Fourteen women serve in the currently convened Parliament. Some 80% of DEC chairs are male, while 16.4% of deputy chairs and 61.3% of secretaries are female. In 46% of the polling stations visited by observers, the chairperson of the PEC was a woman.

The low level of campaign activism impeded a thorough assessment of the degree of female participation in campaign activities or the inclusion of women issues in political platforms. Observers report that men and women participated equally in the pre-election registration.

Participation of National Minorities

Observers assess minority understanding of the electoral process as having increased since the 2003 parliamentary elections when minorities' uneven comprehension of election materials published in

Georgian was found to have contributed to electoral violations in Azeri and Armenian areas. To address these problems, the CEC printed bilingual ballots (Georgian-Russian), and voter registration materials in Azeri, Armenian, Russian and Georgian for the 2004 Presidential elections. Numerous domestic and international groups supported the implementation of voter education programs targeting minority villages.

However, in minority regions bilingual ballots were not always available (Akhaltikhe, Ninotsminda) PEC members complained to observers of being unable to understand polling instructions (Marneuli, Alkhalkalaki). This especially caused problems during the filling in of protocols which were only in Georgian in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli the predominantly Armenian and Azeri areas.

Civil Society

The IEOM notes the positive and enthusiastic involvement of non-governmental organizations, and their contribution to civil society through their active participation in elections. Georgia's non-governmental community was significantly engaged in domestic observation during the 2003 parliamentary elections, in particular the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), the dominant non-governmental domestic observer groups. Consequently, several ISFED staff members were subsequently brought into the election administration in preparation for the 2004 extraordinary presidential election.

Overall, domestic observation was less thorough and widespread than during the November parliamentary elections. ISFED and GYLA were well represented in some areas, but virtually absent in others. ISFED intended to conduct a parallel vote tabulation (PVT) and parallel turn out tabulation (PTT). Domestic groups were generally not obstructed in their work, and did not encounter intimidation as they had in the past. In Adjara harassment of civil society activists in the run up to the election, and the arrest of a GYLA observer during the November polls, had initially made some organizations anxious about observing. However on Election Day ISFED, GYLA, the National Movement, and several others groups, observed apparently without hindrance.

Election Day, Vote Count, and Tabulation

Voting proceeded smoothly and in a calmer atmosphere than for the November elections. Despite concerns that voter turnout would be low due to the holiday season, participation was high according to the CEC announcement of 83% turnout. Observers witnessed great popular enthusiasm and eagerness among the voters. Disturbances or unrest only occurred at 20 polling stations visited. In general, few serious violations were reported by observers.

As with past elections, voter irregularities were particularly significant in Kvemo Kartli where the count and tabulation violated basic procedures. Observers in Rustavi, Marneuli and Bolnisi reported that few protocols could be reconciled. In Rutavi, protocols were filled out and corrected in the National Movement headquarters. Observers reported instances of ballot stuffing in Marneuli (PEC 2,4, and 16)

and in Gardabani (PEC 36). In addition, widespread proxy voting could raise questions about the integrity of the results in those districts.

Majoritarian district re-runs and second rounds from the November parliamentary elections were held in 15 districts. The polls proceeded smoothly except in Khashuri where violence outside a PEC where a re-run was to be held kept it closed all day, and in Akhalkalaki where there was unrest in one PEC.

Election day registration occurred in most polling stations. People were added to the lists if they met the residency requirement. Observers saw PEC staff turning people away when they could not prove their residency in the PEC jurisdiction (18.5% of cases), however in about 4% of cases registration was done without a proper residency check (Tbilisi, Liakhvi, Gori, Bolnisi, and Akhalkalaki).

The application and verification of anti-fraud ink was inconsistent in many regions of the country including in Shida Kartli (Gori, Kareli), Samtskhe Javakheti (Akhalkalaki), Kvemo Kartli (Marneuli, Tsalka), Imereti (Chiatura, Baghdati, Vani, Kharagauli), Kakheti (Gurjaani), Mtskheta-Mtianeti (Mtskheta, Dusheti, Kazbegi, Akhagori). In 10-11% of cases observers found that voters were rarely or never inked or checked for inking. In some areas PEC members did not apply the ink when they were confident that they knew all voters. However the absence of ink reduced the effectiveness of an important anti-fraud mechanism. Inadequate voter verification also increased the likelihood of multiple and family voting. Observers noted cases of identical signatures on voters' lists, especially in Marneuli, Tsalka, and Ninotsminda.

As observed in the pre-election period, on polling day election commissions did not always maintain a sufficient distance from candidate Saakashvili's campaign, or from state authorities. New Years cards with a message from Saakashvili were distributed in PECs (Rustavi, Marneuli) and roses were strewn in PECs throughout the country. National Movement staffers were present in some PECs but only overtly observed directing voters to vote for Saakashvili in Ninotsminda. Local authorities (Bolnisi, Gori, Ninotsminda) and police (Rustavi, Bolnisi, Gori) were also observed in some PECs. In Kobuleti, observers witnessed five PEC chairs going to the office of the local executive with protocols rather than to the DEC.

The atmosphere on elections commissions appeared collegial, and staff worked with diligence. However, observers noted that many commissions would benefit from additional training, as many staff members were newly appointed.

The atmosphere during the vote count was generally positive with minor incidents. However in over 15% of PECs the conduct of the count was assessed to be poor or very poor. In some 5% of PECs significant violations occurred, and the relatively large number of unauthorized persons noted inside polling stations was of particular concern. At the DEC level, significant problems associated with the reconciliation of result protocols were noted in Sangori, Chughureti, Gldani, Rustavi, Marneuni and Bolnisi.

*This statement is also available in Georgian.
However, the English version remains the only official document.*

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mr. Bruce George, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA), was appointed as Special Coordinator by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to lead the short-term observers. Mr. Matyas Eorsi, led the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) delegation, and Mr. Demetrio Volcic led the European Parliament (EP) delegation. Mr. Craig Jenness (Canada) headed the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) opened in Tbilisi on 5 December with 38 experts and long-term observers deployed in the capital and 10 regional centres. On election day, the IEOM deployed some 450 short-term observers from 38 OSCE participating States, including 22 parliamentarians from the OSCE PA, 13 from PACE, and three from the European Parliament. The Council of Europe Secretariat deployed an additional 23 observers. The IEOM observed voting throughout Georgia in 1500 polling stations out of a total of 2,850, and counting was observed in some 130 polling stations. The IEOM was also present in more than 40 district election commissions to observe the tabulation of results.

The OSCE/ODIHR will issue a comprehensive report on these elections approximately one month after the completion of the process.

The IEOM wishes to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Election Commission, and other national and local authorities for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the observation. The IEOM also wishes to express appreciation to the OSCE Mission to Georgia and other international organizations and embassies accredited in Tbilisi for their support throughout the duration of the mission.

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