



OSCE
Election Observation Mission



THE ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Joint Preliminary Statement Second Round

25 May 1998

This is the preliminary statement of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Election Observation Mission for the 24 May second round of the Hungarian parliamentary elections. This statement is issued prior to the publication of the final official results.

This statement supplements the one issued on 11 May after the first round. The final report on the election will be issued by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in June, and will contain a more detailed analysis based on ODIHR's observation of the entire process.

The OSCE Election Observation Mission would again like to thank the head of the National Election Office and his staff for continuing to provide the utmost support in the course of the observation.

Summary of Conclusions

- The OSCE Election Observation Mission would like to reiterate its opinion expressed after the first round that the organisation of the Hungarian parliamentary elections was highly professional and transparent and enjoyed the confidence of the public and political parties alike.
- Political parties had ample access to the media, and the media, on the whole, gave full and balanced coverage to the political parties.
- Election day was again characterised by good organisation in the polling stations and a calm and orderly approach from the voters. The positive nature of political party representation on polling station committees is to be stressed, as this serves to increase the transparency of and confidence in the electoral process.
- The relatively high turnout of voters for a second round was a very positive development.
- The Observation Mission recommended a number of amendments to the election law in its first statement. Despite these technical issues, the Hungarian electoral system fully allows for an open election environment in which all parties are able to compete on an equitable basis.
- The OSCE Election Observation Mission can conclude therefore that the 1998 Hungarian parliamentary elections were held in full accordance with OSCE Commitments.

Electoral System and Procedures

Consideration needs to be given to the existing provision regulating the withdrawal of candidates in single mandate constituencies between the two rounds of elections. The current regulation, allowing candidates to withdraw at the last minute and thus necessitating the crossing out of names on the ballot paper, is far from ideal. There needs to be a fixed deadline for the withdrawal of candidates, which affords political parties time to decide on their candidature priorities whilst also allowing for the timely printing of ballot papers.

There was some debate whether the election authorities should issue a written notice to voters informing them of the second round. The law does not currently require the election authorities to issue this. They are

to be commended for making the effort to do so. However, given that Hungary has a system under which a second round is highly likely, such a notice to voters should be standard procedure, especially given the fact that the validity of the second round is dependent upon the voter turnout.

Electoral Campaign and Media

The National Election Commission dealt with complaints regarding the distribution of two posters before the second round. The Commission also ruled on a party's improper allocation of media time.

These two issues highlight the fact that the National Election Commission responded to complaints in a timely and proper fashion. However, they also highlight the fact that the law needs to provide for stipulated penalties for violations of the law, with an appropriate body given the power to impose the penalty and enforce decisions.

Media coverage of the campaign between the two rounds reflected the natural interest in the largest parties nationally. Whilst coverage of the parties varied somewhat in terms of quantity of coverage, the media was once again largely balanced and neutral.

There appeared to be some confusion in the media regarding what kind of coverage is permissible during the campaign silence. It might be pertinent to more clearly define in the election law the limitations on political coverage in the media during the campaign silence.

Voting and Counting Processes

Based on reports from observers, the voting and counting processes were carried out to a very high standard, and the professionalism and efficiency which characterised the first round were also characteristic of the second.

The use of information technology to facilitate the work of election authorities at all levels and to make information readily available to observers, press and political parties, again served to increase the professionalism and transparency of the electoral process.

Observers reported some inconsistency in the polling stations regarding the application of the rule for voting with a certificate in a place other than a voter's normal place of residence. There needs to be a strict application of the rule, which, given the constituency basis of the election, should be based on the principle that the place of voting for the second round should be the same as for the first round.

Based on the observation of the first and second rounds of the Hungarian parliamentary elections the OSCE Election Observation Mission is very satisfied that Hungary meets its OSCE Commitment to democratic elections.

Mr. Mark Power-Stevens was appointed by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) as the On-site Co-ordinator of the Election Observation Mission. Mr. Dzsingisz Gabor, Head of the Dutch delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, was appointed by the Chairman-in-Office as a Special Co-ordinator to the Election Observation Mission.

The report is based upon the findings of the 8-person long-term observation mission of, which has been present in Hungary since 10 April. It also incorporates the election day observations, in accordance with ODIHR methodology, of some 36 observers, who covered 11 of Hungary's 20 territorial units. International observers represented 13 OSCE participating States.

For further information please contact:

OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission

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