

**ELECTION of the PRESIDENT  
24 January and 7 February 2000**

**REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**



**INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

**Second Round of Presidential Elections**

**Zagreb, 8 February 2000** – The 7 February 2000 second round election of the President of the Republic of Croatia confirmed the progress in fulfilling the country's commitments as a participating State of the OSCE.

The two candidates who received the highest number of votes during the first round of voting on 24 January 2000 were able to compete effectively for the presidency. Their campaigns, carried out mainly through the media, continued to be dynamic. Proxies, predominantly of the two competing candidates and non-partisan domestic as well as international observers were able to monitor the work of election commissions. Seven non-partisan domestic NGOs were accredited to observe the work of voting committees, and it is highly encouraging that one of those, GONG, was able to deploy a large number of observers for a third time in one month.

The State Election Commission addressed some problems observed during the parliamentary and first round presidential polls. In particular, the SEC replaced all members of some 18 voting committees in Bosnia and Herzegovina where voting was marred by serious irregularities during the parliamentary and first round presidential polls, and conducted training for the newly appointed members.

As during the campaign for the first round on 24 January, the State broadcaster HRT provided generally neutral, balanced and objective coverage of candidates' campaign activities. Both candidates enjoyed equal conditions and were able to convey their message to the electorate.

In Croatia, generally, polling and vote-count procedures were again conducted in a calm and orderly manner, and voters were able to express their political will freely. The voting committees carried out their duties professionally and generally according to the prescribed procedures. However, irregularities were observed in some polling stations, including lack of adequate equipment to ensure privacy for voters and safely sealed ballot boxes. Additionally, some polling station premises remained unsuitable. These irregularities resulted mainly from vague instructions issued by the supervising authority.

Polling in Bosnia and Herzegovina improved, mainly due to the action taken by the State Election Commission and the efforts of the members of the committees. However some

polling stations were crowded and some irregularities were observed. These included a lack of rigour and consistency in applying and checking for ultraviolet ink, checking voter identities and voter lists. Overall the vote count was adequate but some committees failed to follow the prescribed procedures.

Despite the progress noted, the International Election Observation Mission remains concerned with the following issues that fundamentally impede Croatia's democratic development: (1) the Law on Citizenship granting ethnic Croats born abroad and having no permanent residence in Croatia the right to Croatian citizenship and the right to vote; (2) a large number of refugees in neighboring countries, mostly members of the Serb minority of Croatia, remain effectively unable to assert their citizenship and therefore exercise their right to vote; and (3) the risk of discrimination and intimidation arising from the identification of voters' ethnicity on voter lists which was retained for this election, though it was irrelevant.

Other significant concerns relate to certain lack of uniformity of the electoral process, the non-participation of political parties in the work of election commissions, the accuracy and transparency of voter registers, particularly for voters without permanent residence in Croatia, and the vague procedural provisions of the election law. Gaps in the election law for the identification of voters without a permanent residence in Croatia and the authorities' reluctance to release reliable information on their numbers raise further concerns. In addition, the segregation of internally displaced voters between two categories and the disproportionate number of polling stations provided to each category, in effect, discriminated between voters of Croat and Serb ethnicity. Although political parties have received individual polling station results from the State Election Commission for the parliamentary elections, efforts should be made to provide these in a more timely manner for all precincts and for the three elections held during the past month.

The OSCE will monitor the follow-up to the above concerns, and stands ready to continue the dialogue with the Parliament, the Government and other authorities of Croatia with a view to addressing these concerns.

The International Election Observation Mission wishes to express appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office for Cooperation with the OSCE, the State Election Commission, and the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the observation.

Mr. Nikolai Vulchanov heads the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).

The OSCE/ODIHR IEOM was established in mid-November 1999 in Zagreb for the parliamentary election and continued for the presidential elections from 10 January 2000, covering the 21 counties throughout Croatia. The observation included the pre-election preparations and the election campaign, as well as polling and counting procedures. The European Institute for the Media undertook a long-term media monitoring. On election day the IEOM deployed more than 200 short-term observers, who visited more than 1,200 polling stations out of the 7,000 across Croatia and all 24 polling stations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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