



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

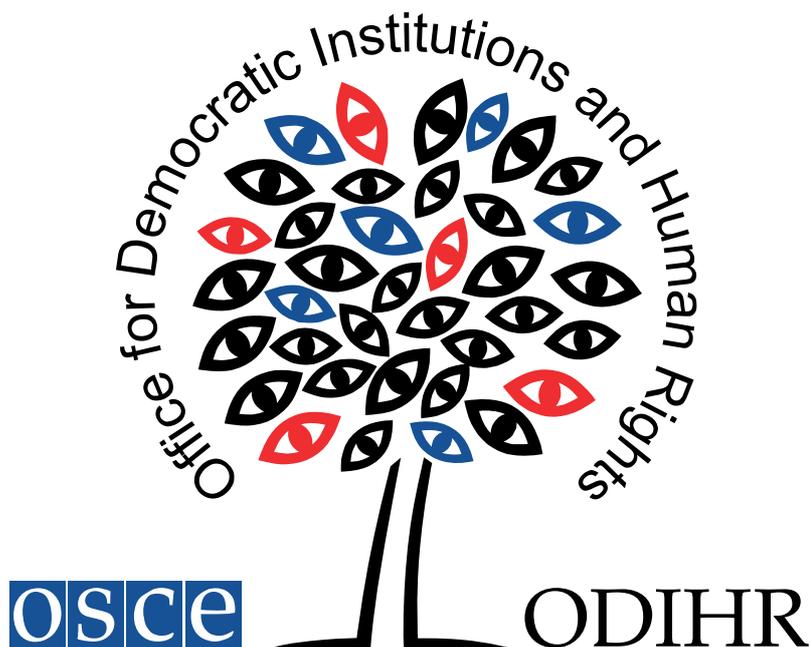
IRELAND

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

26 February 2016

OSCE/ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT

25-27 January 2016



Warsaw
11 February 2016

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IRELAND
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OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report

I. INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of an invitation to observe the 26 February 2016 parliamentary elections, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) to Ireland from 25 to 27 January.¹ The NAM included Steven Martin, OSCE/ODIHR Senior Adviser on New Voting Technologies, and Oleksii Lychkovakh, OSCE/ODIHR Election Adviser.

The purpose of the mission was to assess the pre-election environment and the preparations for the parliamentary elections. Based on this assessment, the NAM recommends whether to deploy an OSCE/ODIHR election-related activity for the forthcoming elections, and if so, what type of activity best meets the identified needs. Meetings were held with officials from state institutions as well as with representatives of political parties, the media and civil society. A list of meetings is included as an annex to this report.

The OSCE/ODIHR would like to thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government for their assistance and co-operation in organizing the visit. The OSCE/ODIHR would also like to thank all of its interlocutors for taking the time to meet with the mission and to share their views.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Upcoming parliamentary elections are to elect 158 members of the *Dáil Éireann* (Lower House). Members are elected for a five-year term through 40 constituencies consisting of three, four or five representatives, depending on population size. Seats are allocated proportionally, through a single transferable vote (PR-STV) system, in which voters numerically rank candidates in order of preference on their ballot. Elections were called on 3 February.

The elections are regulated by the Constitution of 1937, the Electoral Act of 1992 and the Electoral Act of 1997. Recent amendments primarily focus on party and campaign finance issues and the introduction of a gender quota, as well as adjusting the number of constituencies and seats in the Lower House. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted the stability of the legislation and expressed full confidence in the legal framework as a sound basis for conducting democratic elections.

The system of election administration is decentralized. The Franchise Section of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government serves a coordination function in providing policy, guidelines and legislative advice, although does not provide formal oversight. A total of 19 returning officers have the primary responsibility for the conduct of elections in the 40 constituencies supported by polling staff hired for almost 7,000 polling stations. The establishment of an independent electoral commission to oversee the conduct of elections is currently under development and the commission is expected to be introduced during the tenure of the next

¹ On 8 February, the OSCE/ODIHR received an official invitation to observe the elections.

parliament. All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the election administration's ability to professionally manage the elections.

Irish citizens over the age of 18 years who are resident in Ireland, as well British citizens who are ordinarily resident in the country are eligible to vote. Voter registration is decentralized and lists are compiled by local authorities. The total number of eligible voters for these elections is around 3.2 million. While a number of OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that the maintenance and accuracy of the registers could be improved, there is overall confidence in the voter registration process.

Citizens over 21 years of age with legal capacity can stand for office except those serving a prison sentence of more than six months or holding certain public positions. Party candidates are required to present a certificate of party affiliation while independent candidates are required to either submit support from 30 voters in the constituency or a financial deposit. Amendments in 2012 require each qualified party to include at least 30 per cent of their total number of candidates from either sex. Parties failing to comply with the quota will be penalized through losing half of their entitlement to state funding.

The campaign officially began when the elections were called and run until the day prior to election day. Campaigning is primarily focused on local activities such as canvassing and small meetings, which facilitate individual interaction with voters. No interlocutors raised concerns about the ability to campaign freely.

Party and campaign finance are comprehensively regulated. Amendments in 2012 focus on reducing contribution limits for various types of donations, introducing more stringent reporting requirements for political parties, and requiring the registration of and reporting by third parties. While contestants are required to report contributions and expenditure following the elections, there are no reporting requirements prior to election day. Most OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors stated that, despite the issues noted with party and campaign finance regulations, they generally considered the system to be comprehensive and sufficient.

The media environment is diverse and includes a wide range of broadcast and print media. Broadcast media are regulated by the Broadcasting Act which provides for fairness, objectivity and impartiality and is supplemented with specific provisions on election coverage. Paid political advertising in electronic media is prohibited; however, broadcasters may air free-of-charge political party broadcasts. The national broadcaster and other media outlets have developed policies and programmes to cover the upcoming elections, including through holding several debates among party leaders. All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed overall confidence in the impartiality of election coverage and satisfaction with media access during elections.

All OSCE/ODIHR interlocutors expressed a high level of confidence in the electoral process and the ability of the election administration to conduct professional and transparent elections. Since the last elections, no new issues have been identified pertaining to the conduct of elections that would benefit from an assessment by the OSCE/ODIHR. While some isolated concerns were raised on specific issues of party and campaign financing and voter registration, these were not identified by electoral stakeholders as significantly impacting the upcoming elections. Nevertheless, OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed a possible observation mission and noted its readiness for an external review.

Based on this, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM does not recommend deploying an election-related activity for the 26 February elections. The OSCE/ODIHR would, however, like to reiterate that a number of its previous recommendations are still valid and encourages authorities to also consider the issues raised by interlocutors in discussions with the OSCE/ODIHR NAM. The OSCE/ODIHR stands ready to offer its assistance upon request in a post-election follow-up process.

III. FINDINGS

A. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Ireland is a constitutional republic with a parliamentary system of government. The *Oireachtas* (parliament) comprises a president and a bicameral body composed of a directly elected lower chamber, the *Dáil Éireann* (House of Representatives), and an indirectly elected upper chamber, the *Seanad Éireann* (Senate). The government is headed by the *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister). The presidency entails certain limited powers.

According to the Constitution, the president should dissolve the lower chamber on the advice of the prime minister and elections should be held within 30 days. Following its dissolution, elections to the upper chamber must be held within 90 days. On 3 February, the prime minister advised the president to dissolve the House of Representatives and parliamentary elections were called for 26 February.

Following the last parliamentary elections in 2011, a coalition government was formed by *Fine Gael* and the Labour Party. The opposition currently comprises *Fianna Fáil*, *Sinn Féin*, Anti-Austerity Alliance – People before Profit, *Renua Ireland*, Social Democrats, Workers and Unemployed Action and 19 independents.

For the 2011 parliamentary elections, the OSCE/ODIHR deployed a Needs Assessment Mission, which did not recommend deploying an election-related activity. For the parliamentary elections in 2007, the OSCE/ODIHR deployed an Election Assessment Mission, which offered a number of recommendations on how the authorities could improve the electoral process.²

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The legal framework regulating elections includes the Constitution of 1937, the Electoral Act of 1992 and the Electoral Act of 1997. The 1992 Electoral Act covers voter registration and the preparation and conduct of elections. The 1997 Electoral Act covers campaign finance and the framework to review constituencies, among other issues. Both acts have been amended numerous times, including since the last parliamentary elections. Recent amendments primarily focus on party and campaign finance issues and the introduction of a gender quota, as well as adjusting the number of constituencies and the number of seats in the lower chamber. Other amendments addressed specific technical aspects of conducting elections, as well as on voter and candidate registration. Previously the OSCE/ODIHR recommended to consider consolidating election legislation into one electoral act, which has not been implemented. Despite this, OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted the stability of the legislation and expressed full confidence in the legal framework as a sound basis for conducting democratic elections.

²

[See all previous OSCE/ODIHR election reports for Ireland.](#)

In total, 158 members, *Teachtaí Dála* (deputies) of the lower chamber are to be elected for a five-year term through 40 multiple-member constituencies, each comprising three, four or five seats, depending on population size.³ Seats are allocated proportionally, through a single transferable vote (PR-STV) system, in which voters numerically rank candidates in order of preference on their ballots. Voters can also select just one candidate, but by indicating preferences they have the opportunity to re-direct their votes to other candidate(s).

The 2013 amendments to the Electoral Act reduced the total number of constituencies (down from 43), adjusted some constituency boundaries and also the number of deputies in constituencies, and decreased the total number of deputies (from 166).⁴ These amendments were based on recommendations proposed by an independent Constituency Commission established in 2012. Such a commission is regularly convened to examine various issues related to the equality of representation in constituencies, based on information gathered from the preceding census. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed overall confidence in the open and consultative process of the Commission and in its recommendations.

In recent years, several reviews of the PR-STV system have taken place, most recently in 2013 through a Constitutional Convention. The Convention did not recommend changing the system and, according to the OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors, there is general agreement to keep the status quo. However, some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that while the current electoral system facilitates a direct link between deputies and their constituents, this often results in deputies focusing on local issues at the expense of broader national-level policy issues.

C. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The system of election administration is decentralized. The Franchise Section of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government serves a coordination role in providing policy, guidelines and legislative advice, though does not provide formal oversight. A total of 19 returning officers (ROs) have the primary responsibility for the conduct of elections in the 40 constituencies. ROs are chosen from among the county registrars, with exception of Dublin and Cork, where county sheriffs are appointed. ROs are supported by their regular staff and, in addition, may employ additional personnel as needed. Most ROs have the responsibility for more than one constituency and may appoint deputy returning officers to manage a specific constituency on their behalf.

According to the authorities, almost 7,000 polling stations will be established for the upcoming elections, each staffed by a presiding officer and a poll clerk, to manage voting. Counting is conducted at the constituency level, starting the day following the elections. ROs recruit polling and counting staff before each election and seek to rehire individuals with previous election experience and are also advised to consider hiring those who are unemployed. Presiding officers are trained for each election. Standard training is not in place with each RO determining how best to conduct their training sessions; some use shared materials, including an online training course. In co-ordination with the Franchise Section, ROs regularly meet to informally share experience and good practice. Authorities noted their ongoing efforts to ensure the participation of disabled voters, which has included adjustments to the layout of the ballot paper as well as ensuring voter access to polling stations either through installing temporary ramps or possible voter relocation if necessary.

³ The Speaker of the lower house is automatically re-elected, if she/ he stands for re-election.

⁴ By law, the total number of deputies in the lower chamber can vary between 153 and 160.

Results per constituency are announced by each respective RO upon the completion of the count; centralized tabulation does not take place. However, media present during the counts regularly report intermediate results and compile nationwide figures in their election coverage.

The law provides for observation of counting by candidate and their representatives and ROs have the discretion to also permit access to media and other entities. Parties met with by the OSCE/ODIHR NAM noted their intention to be present at the counts and to undertake parallel vote tabulation, and are generally satisfied with their access. In specific cases upon request, ROs may also grant access to polling, although this is deemed an exception. Despite a previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, there are no explicit provisions providing for the presence of citizen or international observers at odds with paragraph 8 of the OSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document.

In recent years, following a previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, movement and consensus towards establishing an independent electoral commission continues. This commission would serve to consolidate and centralize responsibilities for the conduct of elections, the voter register, and campaign financing under a single body. Previous governments have supported such an initiative, which was subsequently recommended by the 2013 Constitutional Convention. Authorities have since published several reports and engaged in extensive public consultations, during which the consensus in favour of establishing an independent electoral commission was reaffirmed. Legislation to enable the establishment and functioning of such a commission is being developed and is expected to be introduced in the next parliament.

All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the election administration's ability to professionally manage the elections, including the complicated counting and tabulation processes.

D. VOTER REGISTRATION

Irish citizens over the age of 18 years who are resident in Ireland, as well British citizens who are ordinarily resident in the country, are eligible to vote. Irish citizens residing abroad are ineligible to vote, with the exception of civil and military servants abroad and their families.

Voter registration is decentralized and lists are compiled by local authorities. Besides eligible Irish citizens, voter registers also includes British citizens, certain EU citizens, and other non-Irish citizens, who are eligible to vote in various elections. The total number of eligible voters for these elections is around 3.2 million.

Registers are available in local offices and online for review. Additions or changes to voter information can be made annually prior to 25 November with the local registration authority on draft lists. Final registers are published on 1 February and come into force on 15 February. Voters not on the register have until 15 days before the elections to apply for inclusion on a supplemental register. Authorities noted that they undertake an annual campaign ahead of publishing the draft registers to encourage voters to verify their voter details. This year, ahead of publishing the final list, reminders for voters to confirm their information were also sent via social media.

There is no specific requirement for a voter to de-register in one constituency before registering in another. Moreover, no comprehensive mechanism exists to cross-check locally maintained registers, which could potentially lead to a multiple entries for the same voter. While local authorities may cross-check and update information between their respective lists, this practice is informal and is

not prescribed by law. The maintenance and accuracy of the voter registers was noted by a number of OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors as an aspect that could be improved. Despite that, there is confidence in the voter registration process and no concerns were raised that such shortcomings are used for any fraudulent activity, such as multiple voting. Several interlocutors noted that list compilation could be enhanced and updated through centralizing voter lists and possibly introducing a unique identifier for each voter, which corresponds to previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations on a comprehensive approach to voter registration.

The law provide for postal and mobile voting for voters not able to cast their vote on election day at a polling station. No issues were raised concerning the integrity of these mechanisms of voting, although it was noted that voters requiring such voting methods faced tight application deadlines due to the short campaign period.

E. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Any Irish citizen over 21 years of age with legal capacity can stand for office except those serving a prison sentence of more than six months or holding certain public positions. There are no residency requirements for candidacy and individuals may run in more than one constituency.

Candidate nomination is managed by the RO of the respective constituency and applications must be received within seven days of calling the elections. Candidates representing a political party are required to present a “certificate of political affiliation” issued by the party headquarters. Independent candidates are required to either submit documented support from 30 voters in the constituency or a deposit of EUR 500. The OSCE/ODIHR NAM was informed that most independent candidates prefer to submit the deposit, as the signature collection process is considered more burdensome.

Women are under-represented in political life.⁵ After consultations on potential gender equality measures, in July 2012, amendments were introduced to the 1997 Electoral Act, requiring each qualified party to include at least 30 per cent of their candidates from either sex.⁶ Parties failing to comply with this quota will be penalized through losing half of their entitlement to state funding.⁷ Political parties` representatives that the OSCE/ODIHR NEAM met with noted that they intend to meet the gender quota requirement, although in some cases this required the party to intervene in their respective constituency nomination process to ensure the legally required gender balance on the party list. In at least one case, a prospective candidate who was excluded from their party’s nomination submitted a complaint to the High Court concerning the legality of the gender quota. The Court has not yet provided a ruling, although it was expected before the elections.

F. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The campaign officially began when the elections were called on 3 February and will run until 14:00 on the day prior to election day. In advance of the official campaign, a number of political parties increased their activities through promoting and convening topical meetings with citizens.

⁵ Women represent less than 20 per cent of members in the outgoing lower chamber.

⁶ The gender quota will increase to 40 per cent for parliamentary elections that take place after 2019 in seven years following the next parliamentary elections.

⁷ Total accumulated state funding is approximately EUR 5 million annually, and can potentially reach up to a few million euros for a party depending on its entitlement.

Campaigning is primarily focused on local activities such as canvassing and small meetings, which facilitate individual interaction with voters. The role of social media in the campaign will be significant and is generally recognized as an important tool for both parties and candidates to complement more established outreach activities. No interlocutors raised concerns about the ability to campaign freely. The campaign is expected to focus on issues related to the economy, in particular to post-austerity recovery, as well as healthcare and taxes.

G. PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Party and campaign finance is primarily regulated by the 1997 Electoral Act. Amendments made to the legislation in 2012 focus on reducing contribution limits for various types of donations (cash, anonymous and corporate), introducing more stringent reporting requirements for political parties, requiring the registration of and reporting by third parties and introducing the gender quota for party lists. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed the enhancements as providing additional transparency and accountability. The 2013 compliance report issued by the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) related to transparency of party and campaign funding noted that Ireland has largely addressed the majority of its recommendations.⁸

Strict rules govern various types of contribution and are comprehensive overall. While there is no limit on the total accumulated amount that can be accepted through cash or anonymous donations (EUR 200 and 100 per donation, respectively), this was generally not considered as a serious deficiency open to abuse. Spending limits during an election are established for parties and candidates and range from EUR 30,150 to 45,200, depending on the number of seats in the constituency. Candidates are entitled to limited public reimbursement of campaign expenses based on either being elected or receiving a certain number of votes.

Electoral contestants (parties, candidates and third-parties) are required to submit reports all on expenditures during the campaign within 56 days of the elections. Financial reports pertaining to donations received are to be submitted annually by elected representatives and political parties, by 31 January and 30 June of the following year, respectively. Thus, there is no requirement to report on campaign incomes and expenditures prior to election day.⁹

The monitoring and oversight of party and campaign finance is managed by the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO).¹⁰ The SIPO has various means to provide information to parties, candidates and other relevant stakeholders, including through comprehensive guidelines and explanatory notes, and makes its reports and findings public available. In addition, authorities noted that they regularly meet with contestants to discuss their obligations under the law and political parties expressed overall satisfaction with the current reporting requirements. While the SIPO has a proactive approach of interaction with electoral stakeholders, certain interlocutors raised potential concern over the limited authority and resources of the SIPO to follow-up on alleged irregularities and to introduce sanctions for non-compliance. Most OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors stated that, despite the issues noted with party and campaign finance regulations, they generally considered the system to be comprehensive and sufficient.

⁸ [See GRECO Third Evaluation Report, Second Compliance Report on Ireland, 18 December 2013.](#)

⁹ Unsuccessful candidates are required to submit information on donations with 56 days after the election and third parties by 31 March of the following year.

¹⁰ The SIPO consists of six members, including the clerks from the lower and upper chambers of parliament, and is supported by the office of the Ombudsman, who is also a member of the commission.

H. MEDIA

The media environment is diverse and includes a wide range of broadcast and print media. The public broadcaster, Irish Radio and Television (RTE), is the main electronic media source, with two television channels and four radio stations providing nationwide coverage. In addition, an Irish language television channel, TG4, and an English language private station, TV3, operate nationally. British media are also widely represented within broadcast and print media. All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed overall confidence in the impartiality of election coverage, as well as satisfaction with media access during elections.

Broadcast media are regulated by the Broadcasting Act, which provides for fairness, objectivity and impartiality of the broadcasters. Based on the Act, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), as the broadcast regulator, developed the Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality on News and Current Affairs in 2013. The Code includes a specific regulation on election coverage and is supplemented with specific guidelines that provide additional information and set out broadcaster requirements during an election. The BAI can issue warnings and sanctions in case of non-compliance and relies on complaints rather than proactively monitoring media broadcasts for compliance.

There are three national daily “broadsheet” newspapers, several daily “tabloid” newspapers, and a number of local papers. In addition, several British dailies with Irish inserts are broadly available. Print media are governed by voluntary self-regulation, which is overseen by a Press Ombudsman and a Press Council, of which most of the country’s and British print media are members. The Council considers around 350 complaints per year, although very rarely on issues related to election coverage. General concern was raised by some OSCE/ODIHR interlocutors over existing defamation legislation, which, while not directly impacting election coverage, may constrain reporting in some cases due to potentially significant financial liability.

RTE and other media have developed coverage policies and programmes to cover the upcoming elections. RTE will allocate airtime to parties based on an established formula.¹¹ The RTE noted that it conducts regular internal monitoring during the campaign to ensure balanced coverage. The RTE also anticipates to launch an online platform on its website for each candidate, including the option for each to upload a video. A number of debates among party leaders are expected to be held during the campaign, including two by the RTE, and one in the Irish language on TG4.

The vote count usually runs for several days following the elections and attracts significant public interest. Many broadcasters intend to provide live coverage from various counting centres around the country; RTE reported that it will broadcast from all count centres.

Paid political advertising in electronic media is prohibited; however, broadcaster may decide to air free-of-charge political party broadcasts, ensuring principles of fairness, objectivity and impartiality. RTE intends to air these broadcasts and ensure equitable access. Only registered political parties are eligible and independent candidates cannot use these broadcasts.

¹¹ This includes first preference support that parties received in previous elections, number of seats in the lower house, number of candidates running in the current elections, and a combination of figures of party support in EU and local elections and average support in current opinion polls.

I. NATIONAL MINORITIES

While Ireland is generally a homogeneous country, there exist some minority groups, including Irish Travellers – an indigenous group whose culture and traditionally nomadic lifestyle distinguish them from the general population, and a small community of Roma.

Some civil society organizations are planning to undertake educational and mobilization activities aimed at encouraging Irish Traveller and Roma communities to register and vote in the upcoming elections. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that despite absence of formal barriers to political participation, most Irish Travellers and Roma are not generally active in political life, citing possible literacy issues as a challenge to their participation in elections. The OSCE/ODIHR NAM was informed that one Irish Traveller would run as an independent candidate in upcoming elections.

J. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The law identifies specific electoral offenses that can be challenged with the High Court, including during the process of voter registration, campaigning, voting, and counting. A petition may also be made against an issue affecting the election results. Decisions of the High Court can be further appealed to the Supreme Court as the court of final instance. There are no special deadlines for hearing complaints and appeals. Stakeholders noted that official complaints are rare.

While submitting a petition, a significant monetary deposit is required, which the OSCE/ODIHR has previously recommended to review as it could potentially discourage someone from seeking legal redress.¹² Overall, interlocutors met with by the OSCE/ODIHR NAM expressed strong confidence in the complaints and appeals system, positively noted existing checks and balances, and did not raise concern on the process of adjudication.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

All OSCE/ODIHR interlocutors expressed a high level of confidence in the electoral process and the ability of the election administration to conduct professional and transparent elections. Since the last elections, no new issues have been identified pertaining to the conduct of elections that would benefit from an assessment by the OSCE/ODIHR. While some isolated concerns were raised on specific issues of party and campaign financing and voter registration, these were not identified by electoral stakeholders as significantly impacting the upcoming elections. Nevertheless, OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed a possible observation mission and noted its readiness for an external review.

Based on this, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM does not recommend deploying an election-related activity for the 26 February elections. The OSCE/ODIHR would, however, like to reiterate that a number of its previous recommendations are still valid and encourages authorities to also consider the issues raised by interlocutors in discussions with the OSCE/ODIHR NAM. The OSCE/ODIHR stands ready to offer its assistance upon request in a post-election follow-up process.

¹² Where the court considers that a petitioner is unable to lodge the amount specified, or that to require a petitioner to lodge the amount would cause serious hardship, the court may require a lesser amount.

ANNEX: LIST OF MEETINGS

Department of Foreign Affairs

Barrie Robinson, Political Director
Julian Clare, Director, Irish Aid
Cillian O'Kelly, Desk Officer, OSCE

Department of Environment, Community and Local Government

Ríona Ní Fhlanghaile, Principal Officer
Enda Falvey, Assistant Principal Officer
Ian Stuart-Mills, Administrative Officer

Standards in Public Office Commission

Paddy Walsh, Secretary
Derek Charles, Commission Secretariat

Ombudsman and Information Commissioner

Peter Tyndall

Returning Officers

Fergus Gallagher, Dublin County
James C Barry, Dublin City

Broadcast Authority

Declan McLoughlin, Compliance and Policy Manager
Aoife Clabby, Compliance Officer

Public Broadcaster Irish Radio and Television (RTE)

David McKenna, Secretary, Election Steering Group

Political Party Representatives

Sean Dorgan, General Secretary, *Fianna Fáil*
Darragh McShea, Assistant General Secretary, *Fianna Fáil*
Tom Fabozzi, Director of Media and Research, *Fine Gael*
Vincent Gribbin, Head of Communications and Media, *Fine Gael*
Dermot O'Gara, Press Officer, Labour Party

Office of the Press Ombudsman

Peter Feeney, Press Ombudsman

The Irish Times Newspaper

Patrick Smyth, Foreign Policy Editor/Chief Leader Writer

Civil Society

Marin Collins, Coordinator, Pavee Point
John Devitt, Chief Executive Transparency International
Deirdre Duffy, Deputy Director, Irish Council for Civil Liberties
Stephen O'Hare, Senior Research and Policy Programme Manager, Irish Council for Civil Liberties
Niamh Gallaher, Women for Election, Co-founder