



**Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION IN ARMENIA**

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**Preliminary Statement of the International Observers
Armenian Presidential Elections, 22 September 1996**

The OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission deployed 89 international observers across all 11 regions of the Republic of Armenia. These observers, in teams of two, visited 350 polling stations throughout election day. Following the close of polls they then observed the counting of the votes. Observer teams then followed the results up through the superior electoral commissions, monitoring the work of 40 of the largest Community Electoral Commissions and 6 Regional Electoral Commissions throughout the night.

The Presidential Election Law and Electoral Administration

The new Presidential Election Law, although not perfect, is a considerable improvement in electoral legislation. Numerous checks and balances have been put in place to safeguard the security of the ballot - the new counting process for the precincts, the opportunity for proxies to validate the ballot papers, access to protocols and the immediate production of results. However, as with any piece of legislation, it is how it is implemented that is critical.

The new Central Electoral Commission, and its Chairman in particular, has made great efforts to improve the level of confidence in the administration of the electoral process at the highest level. Its level of professionalism is a dramatic improvement on last year.

In addition it should be noted that the observers cited numerous examples of good practice which match internationally accepted standards. For example the administration of the elections in large parts of Lori, Shirak and Tavush, observers saw many examples of electoral commissions working professionally.

The Pre-Election Campaign & the Media

There was no doubt that Levon Ter-Petrosian, as the incumbent President, would enjoy a considerable advantage over his opponents throughout the race. However, the quantitative monitoring of the media, conducted by the European Institute for the Media, demonstrates quite clearly that the advantage that Levon Ter-Petrosian had over his opponents far exceeded what is normal in such contests elsewhere in the world. For example, according to the EIM's observations, Levon Ter-Petrosian had 1050 minutes of editorial coverage on State TV's Channel 1 by September 17. By comparison Vazgen Manoukian secured only 65 minutes, Ashot Manoucharian 48

minutes, and Sergei Badalian 37.5 minutes. Although Vazgen Manoukian secured some advantage following the formation of the National Accord, when the three former presidential candidates announced their intention to withdraw and used, quite legally, their free time on TV to campaign for Mr. Manoukian, this did not come anywhere near redressing the balance.

Given the imbalance in television coverage it seemed perverse that State TV denied Mr. Manoukian and Mr. Manoucharian their last portion of paid TV time in the last week of the campaign, particularly as State TV confirmed that they did have time available in their schedules.

The Conduct of the Polling Day

Observers saw many examples of electoral commissions working efficiently and effectively on the day of the elections, and it is worth noting that this was their experience in the majority of polling stations visited.

On a practical note, observers were concerned with the accuracy of some of the voters lists in the polling stations and expressed the hope that they could be improved in the future.

However, observers did witness significant and serious breaches in the law. The most serious of which was observed in precinct 6/22 in the central district of Yerevan where a group of people entered the polling station illegally after cutting the electricity supply and stole ballot papers and the ballot box. This type of activity is not acceptable in a democratic state and we hope that a full and thorough investigation will take place and, if possible, the culprits are brought before the courts and prosecuted.

The observers were also concerned with the frequency in which observers noted unauthorised persons present in the polling stations. In particular we are concerned by the presence of members of the Ministries of Interior and Defence in a disturbingly large numbers of polling stations in parts of Yerevan, Kotayk, Ararat and Armavir. Although we feel that the law is clear, it may be helpful to make it clear that such people may only be present in the polling station when they are voting.

The Military Voting

The presidential election law is at its weakest in dealing with Military voting. Although it is understandable, given the recent experience in Armenia, that there should be some protection given to members of the Military, it seems that the provision for the Military to provide their own lists was abused. In many cases the lists of Military voters was provided late and in some cases, for example precinct 2/13 in Echmiadzin, soldiers were added to list despite the protests of members of the precinct electoral commission.

Serious breaches of the secrecy of the ballot and examples of officers directing their troops were witnessed in 40% of the polling stations which observers visited in which the military voted. For example in precinct 5/27 in Yerevan two observer teams at two different times in the day witnessed officers directing their soldiers to vote for specific

candidate. In precinct 41/1 in Ararat region observers saw soldiers instructed by officers to vote for a specific candidate.

Clearly the sections on Military voting in the electoral law needs to be renewed and, if thought necessary, amended.

Summary

There has been a significant improvement in the electoral legislation and its administration, particularly at the level of the Central Electoral Commission. In many cases precincts matched international standards and norms.

Although access to TV has improved, further steps could and , we hope will, be taken to continue this process.

Although serious breaches in the law witnessed by international observers do not in themselves constitute a systematic attempt to deny the will of the people.

Furthermore, it is the opinion of the observers that, although very serious, these breaches in the law do not seem to have materially affected the outcome of the election at this stage in the process.

**Simon Osborn, OSCE/ODIHR International Observer Coordinator,
Armenian Presidential Elections, 24 September, 1996**