



ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION SERBIA 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Press Release

ODIHR, Council of Europe observers say second round of Serbian presidential election in line with international standards

BELGRADE, 4 February 2008 – International observers from ODIHR and from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) concluded that the second round of voting in Serbia's presidential election yesterday was conducted in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments for democratic elections.

“Political parties’ access to all stages of the process and the transparency of the election administration further enhanced confidence in the election,” said Nikolai Vulchanov, head of the ODIHR observer mission. “The high turnout once again confirms that Serbia has built a strong foundation for democracy.”

“I was impressed by the maturity shown by the people of Serbia, and I also congratulate both candidates for their commitment to democratic principles,” said Andreas Gross, head of the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. “I hope that the President is able to build the much-needed bridges in society to strengthen the process of European integration.”

Incumbent President Boris Tadić of the Democratic Party and Tomislav Nikolić of the Serbian Radical Party campaigned actively ahead of the second round, offering voters a choice between two distinct political perspectives. The campaign environment was competitive and calm, the media provided equitable access to both candidates, and the process was efficiently administered.

The main campaign topics were related to ties with the European Union and the status of Kosovo. Several prominent political actors abstained from supporting either candidate. Prime Minister Koštunica's possible endorsement of one of the candidates was an important topic of the media's campaign coverage.

Broadcast and print media provided equitable opportunities for both candidates. Paid political advertising was widely used, with each candidate often portraying his opponent in negative terms.

Overall, public broadcaster RTS 1 offered largely balanced and neutral coverage of both candidates. In its regular news broadcasts – representing about one-quarter of the total programming on RTS1 that was monitored by the observer mission – President Tadić received almost twice as much coverage as Nikolić. This was mostly due to the coverage of

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his institutional activities. In a welcome step, the two candidates presented their platforms and exchanged views on eight previously agreed topics in a 90-minute televised debate.

The turnout was over 67 per cent, confirming a high level of public interest in the election. Get-out-the-vote campaigns were conducted by a variety of civil society groups. In addition, there was speculation that some voters might have been led to believe that they had to vote in order to be eligible to receive shares in privatized companies, as the law on privatization links the distribution of shares with voter registration.

The run-off was administered by the Republic Election Commission (REC) in an open and transparent manner, in line with domestic legislation. All 18 complaints alleging irregularities during the first round were dismissed by the REC either on procedural grounds or for having no legal basis. None of the REC decisions on these complaints were appealed to the Supreme Court.

International observers did not conduct systematic or comprehensive observation of polling, counting, or the tabulation of results. Observers visited a limited number of polling stations on election day. Voting and counting were conducted in an orderly manner. However, issues related to secrecy of the vote noted during the first round and in previous observation reports remain to be addressed.

ODIHR deployed a limited election observation mission on 4 January, and will remain in Serbia until the election process is completed. The mission consists of nine international experts based in Belgrade and 12 long-term observers deployed across the country. This press statement should be read in conjunction with the previous statement of 21 January that was issued after the first round of voting. A final report will be issued approximately two months after the completion of the process.

ODIHR and the PACE delegation would like to thank the Foreign Ministry, the Republic Election Commission, and other state and local authorities, as well as working groups and voting boards, candidates' campaign staff, civil society, and media organizations for their co-operation during the course of the mission. The support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and embassies of OSCE participating States and international organizations accredited to Serbia was highly appreciated.