

OSCE/ODIHR

Election Observation Mission to Slovakia

Parliamentary Elections 2002



STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Bratislava, 22 September 2002 – The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the Slovak Republic **concluded** that the 20/21 September election for the National Council was in compliance with international commitments and standards for the conduct of democratic elections.

The election, marking the third such exercise since 1993, has special **significance** as the newly elected 150 seat National Council is expected to guide Slovakia toward accession to both the European Union and NATO.

The political **campaign** was calm, low key, and evolved more around personalities than policy issues. From 25 party candidate lists on offer, only seven crossed the 5% threshold to assume representation in the new parliament, none obtaining a majority of seats. Voter turnout was a respectable 70%.

A number of amendments to the **electoral legislation** were introduced over the past four years improving the credibility, transparency, and accountability of procedures governing elections to the National Council. Nonetheless, some shortcomings remain: CEC regulatory instructions should be binding on lower level election commissions; provisions for domestic and international observers should be included, though the CEC was liberal in granting accreditation to both; and provisions governing the treatment of the electoral campaign by electronic media should be clarified.

A high degree of popular trust in the **electoral administration** was sustained by the inclusion of party-nominated members in all commissions - CEC, district, and polling station. An equal number of commission slots were given to all parties, while the selection of commission chairs and their deputies was subject to consensus, or the drawing of lots. These measures enhanced transparency, and provided for candidate confidence in the process. As a result, few complaints and appeals were recorded during this campaign and all were addressed adequately.

Electoral commissions discharged their responsibilities impartially. Sustained training of electoral commission members contributed to smooth, efficient operation of the electoral mechanisms at all levels. Security and transparency of the system was enhanced by the computerized arrangements for tabulation and transfer of data from the districts to the CEC.

With respect to the public broadcast **media**, Slovak Television fulfilled its legal obligation to provide 21 hours of airtime shared equally among the contesting parties and maintained a balanced attitude in its campaign coverage. Also, public radio fulfilled its legal obligation.

Private electronic and print media, as a whole, provided a variety of views concerning the campaign. By contrast, *Markiza*, Slovakia's most popular private television station lacked fairness in its primetime news coverage, favoring the newly formed ANO party, both in terms of quantity and quality of coverage. ANO's leader is a major owner of *Markiza*. Three newspapers, *Pravda*, *Novy Cas*, and *Novy Den* violated the campaign moratorium during the 48 hours preceding election day.

National **minorities** were represented in the campaign by one Hungarian and two Roma parties. Members of these and other minorities were also entered on other party candidate lists, but on positions too low to qualify for a seat. The Hungarian party easily passed the threshold and will have representation in the new parliament. The Roma parties did not have similar success.

Women made up 22.9 percent of all candidates, but their share was considerably lower among top of the list candidates.

Non-governmental organizations were notably active throughout the campaign. Their election related activities included voter education, get-out-the-vote campaigns, as well as media and campaign monitoring. Several such programs were directly targeted on the Roma community.

In **summary**, the 2002 election to the National Council demonstrated the sustainability of democratic development in the Slovak Republic.

*This statement is available in the English and Slovak languages.
However, the English text is the only official version.*

MISSION INFORMATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The OSCE/ODIHR EOM was invited to observe this election by the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The EOM started on 23 August, with observers deployed in Bratislava, Kosice, and Banska Bystrica. The EOM did not deploy short-term observers on election day as this was not deemed necessary. Thus, this statement is based on the EOM's long-term observation. A final report and recommendations will be issued by OSCE/ODIHR within approximately a month of the completion of the electoral process.

The OSCE/ODIHR and the EOM wish to express appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the Central Election Commission, and other authorities for their full cooperation and assistance throughout the term of this observation.

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