



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

THE OSCE/ODIHR INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER MISSION'S STATEMENT ON THE SECOND ROUND OF THE LITHUANIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

10 NOVEMBER 1996

The OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observer Mission issued a statement on the first round of the Lithuanian Parliamentary elections on 22 October 1996. The first round statement concluded that, despite the generally efficient administration and the democratic spirit under which the elections were conducted, there were some serious concern drawn from election day observations involving the legal guarantee to vote by secret ballot in the privacy of a polling booth.

It is the view of the OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observer Mission that the second round of the Lithuanian Parliamentary elections were conducted efficiently, calmly and according substantially to international standards. However the secrecy of the ballot was still not observed universally in the second round despite attempts by the Supreme Electoral Commission to rectify this breach of the law.

Although observers noted that the incidence of voters voting openly outside the polling booths had been dramatically reduced, they did report many voters voting collectively, usually in family groups, inside the booths (collective/family voting was observed in 65 in 72 polling stations visited). This breach in international standards and Lithuania's election law is of particular concern given the very disturbing allegations of persons unknown, and as yet still at liberty, who bribed a small number of voters to cast their postal vote for a certain candidate outside Vilnius City Post Office number 4 serving polling station 6 in area 1 (report in *Respublika*, 8/11/96 and confirmed by the Chairman of the SEC) before the first round of voting. Clearly open and collective voting opens up the potential for intimidation, manipulation and bribery of voters.

The Mission welcomed the Supreme Electoral Commission efforts to enforce the secrecy of the ballot by printing instructions to vote in secret on the voter certificates issued for the second round. Furthermore observers, particularly in rural areas, noted that more polling booths had been erected for the second round. However in urban areas, observers recorded that there still was only the statutory minimum number of booths and consequently noted a high proportion of voters voting collectively and, in some cases, openly.

In a couple of polling stations observers reported that the district electoral commission had placed a sign on the polling booths instructing voters to vote in secret and one at a time. These

examples of limited efforts to inform voters of their duties under the law seemed to bear fruit as observers did not, in these cases, see open or collective voting.

- ❑ Given the evidence that voter education and signs etc seems to have reduced the frequency of breaches in the election law, consideration should be given to making a greater effort, through basic voter education materials, to inform voters of their rights and responsibilities under the law.
- ❑ Furthermore, consideration should be given to amending the election laws to increase the minimum number of polling booths required per head of population, currently 2 per 2,000 voters.
- ❑ It may also be appropriate to consider publishing a guide to ‘best practice’ for election commission members.

OSCE/ODIHR appointed Mr Simon Osborn (UK) as On-site Co-ordinator for the second round of voting on Sunday 10 November.

The Final Report on both rounds of the Lithuanian Parliamentary Elections will be submitted shortly to the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

12 November 1996