



**Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
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6th November 1996

**Romanian Parliamentary and Presidential Elections
3rd November 1996**

PRESS RELEASE

Following notification from the Permanent Mission to the OSCE that Romania welcomed the presence of international observers two representatives of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights observed the election process and supported and co-ordinated the activities of international observers from OSCE participating states.

The observation mission was comprised of 51 experienced short term observers together with a similar number of representatives from the local embassies and non-governmental organisations. A total of 18 member states were represented and there was close co-operation with the other international monitoring bodies and with the national observer organisations.

Observers were present in 26 of the 42 constituencies covering both towns and rural areas. Over 1500 polling stations were visited on polling day and detailed report forms were completed in respect of the polling and counting process observed at polling station bureaux.

ODIHR recognises the difficulties associated with organising elections and given the complexity and sheer size of the operation here in Romania there were understandably administrative and procedural problems. But generally speaking, the elections administration did remarkably well in organising and conducting the elections and in the main only minor irregularities were reported by the observers. There was a discernible improvement in election administration since the elections in 1992. However the absence of a permanent and professionally staffed Central Electoral Bureau is regarded as a major weakness of the Romanian electoral system. Organisation may only be improved further and the democratic process strengthened by the establishment of a permanent independent body to oversee the electoral process. Given the ad-hoc approach to organising the elections, the unwieldy nature of the process itself and the lack of clear guidelines in the form of instruction manuals there were shortcomings resulting in a lack of consistency and uniformity of practice.

The electoral laws provide the necessary framework for participation in the elections and for their administration and conduct. However there is an absence of rules and regulations expanding on the law as well as defining and clarifying the various aspects of the electoral

process. A review of the electoral process is required with a view to simplifying the technical procedures so as to speed up the process and to ensure greater transparency. The dedication of all those who formed part of the bureaux has to be admired, but the long hours required to conduct the polling, the counting and the presentation of minutes and reports is an intolerable burden on polling station bureau members particularly the presidents, and does nothing to attract and retain persons of the right calibre and experience which is so vital to the democratic process.

Here in Romania competing political interests are represented during the entire electoral process. Partisan representatives play an essential role in safeguarding the process and generally there was good representation on the polling station and constituency bureaux. But non-partisan monitors in the form of national observer organisations also play an important role in establishing and enhancing public confidence. Their existence and presence at all levels of the process provides for greater transparency.

It is regrettable therefore that severe restrictions were placed on national observer participation contrary to the election related commitments in the Copenhagen Document of 1990. Such restrictions resulted in a reduced presence at polling station level and no presence at constituency levels. If the conditions for transparency are to be met fully the vote count should be visible and verifiable from the level of the polling station through to the stage of tabulation of results and awarding of mandates. Permanent provisions in the electoral laws for full participation by national observer organisations is therefore required.

The complete independence and impartiality of polling station bureau presidents and vice presidents is essential to the proper conduct of the electoral process and it is of concern that the procedure for the selection of such persons, and the process of drawing lots at designation is not conducted in an open and transparent way and resulted in a number of contestations.

While the special lists are a well intended effort to create an inclusive process by endeavouring to maximise enfranchisement the extensive use of these lists is of concern. There is a need to improve the completeness and accuracy of the permanent electoral lists, to provide for public scrutiny of all lists so as to enhance the transparency of the process and to consider alternative measures for absent voting.

A successful monitoring exercise may be achieved only through the full co-operation of those involved in the electoral process. It is pleasing to note that this co-operation was forthcoming from all levels of the electoral administration and from the ministries and other public administration bodies with only a few reported incidents of hindrance. Generally the international observers were greeted with warmth and courtesy and their role of displaying to the electorate that there is strong international support for peaceful democratic elections in Romania was welcomed.

A final detailed report on the elections will be submitted to the OSCE Permanent Council and to the Romanian Authorities.

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