



**ELECTION of the PRESIDENT
24 January 2000
REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

PRESS RELEASE

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Zagreb, 25 January 2000 – The 24 January 2000 election of the President of the Republic of Croatia marked further progress in fulfilling the country's commitments as a participating State of the OSCE and as a member of the Council of Europe.

Nine party-nominated and independent candidates were able to register and compete effectively for the presidency. Their campaigns, which included unrestricted meetings with the electorate, were dynamic. Party proxies and domestic as well as international observers were able to monitor the work of election commissions. The State Election Commission was able to remedy some deficiencies of the legislative framework for the presidential election (adopted in 1992) by implementing relevant regulatory improvements from the parliamentary elections and decisions of the Constitutional Court.

In a marked contrast to previous elections, the State broadcaster HRT was noticeably more balanced, in general, providing neutral and objective coverage of candidates' campaign activities. Within the legally mandated free air-time, candidates enjoyed equal conditions and were able to convey their message to the electorate. However, a domestic non-governmental organization, GLAS 2000 Coalition, established to provide voter education, engaged in a partisan political campaign partly through paid advertisements.

On election day, the 63% turnout indicated continuing voter confidence in the electoral process. Some 4,000 non-partisan domestic observers were able to monitor polling day procedures. In general, polling and vote-count procedures were conducted in a calm and orderly manner, and voters were able to express their political will freely. However, some irregularities were observed, including lack of privacy for voters, in particular in some of the war-affected areas.

The polling in Bosnia and Herzegovina was marred by irregularities, again raising concerns about the integrity of the process there. Polling in Novi Travnik, Mostar, Capljina, Livno, and Siroki Brijeg was flawed. Multiple voting and failure to use ultraviolet ink to prevent such voting, secrecy of voting, failure to verify identification documents, and inadequate checking of voter registers were noted by observers. Polling commissions in some precincts failed to perform their duties in a neutral and professional manner.

Despite the progress noted, important concerns continue to fundamentally impede Croatia's democratic development. These concerns include: (1) the Law on Citizenship granting ethnic

Croats born abroad and having no permanent residence in Croatia the right to Croatian citizenship and the right to vote; (2) a large number of refugees in neighboring countries, mostly members of the Serb minority of Croatia, remain effectively unable to assert their citizenship and therefore exercise their right to vote; and (3) the risk of discrimination and intimidation associated with the ethnic identification on voter lists was retained for this election, though it was irrelevant.

Other important concerns relate to the effective participation of political parties in the work of election commissions, the accuracy and transparency of voter registers, and the vague procedural provisions of the election law. Gaps in the election law for the identification of voters without a permanent residence in Croatia and the authorities' reluctance to release reliable information on their numbers raise further concerns. In addition, the segregation of internally displaced voters between two categories and the disproportionate number of polling stations provided to each category, in effect, discriminated between voters of Croat and Serb ethnicity.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe will monitor the follow-up to the above concerns, and stand ready to continue the dialogue with the Parliament, the Government and other authorities of Croatia with a view to addressing these concerns.

The International Election Observation Mission wishes to express appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office for Cooperation with the OSCE, the State Election Commission, and the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the observation.

The International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) is a joint effort of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Mr. Nikolai Vulchanov heads the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission. Senator Daniel Goulet leads the Parliamentary Assembly delegation of the Council of Europe.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission was established in mid-November 1999 in Zagreb for the parliamentary election and continued for the presidential elections from 10 January 2000, covering the 21 counties throughout Croatia. Their observation includes the pre-election preparations and the election campaign. The European Institute for the Media undertook a long-term media monitoring. On election day, the IEOM deployed more than 300 short-term observers, including parliamentarians from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe from three political groups. Observers visited more than 1,000 polling stations out of the 7,000 across Croatia and all 24 polling stations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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