



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

Repeat Parliamentary Election, Georgia – 28 March 2004

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Tbilisi, 29 March 2004 - The International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) for the 28 March partial repeat parliamentary election in Georgia is a co-operative undertaking of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament (EP).

This preliminary statement is issued prior to the tabulation and announcement of official election results and before election day complaints and appeals have been addressed. A complete and final analysis of the election process will be offered in the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The 28 March 2004 repeat parliamentary election in Georgia demonstrated commendable progress in relation to previous elections. The Georgian authorities have seized the opportunity, since the 4 January presidential election, to further bring Georgia's election process in closer alignment with European standards for democratic elections, including OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards.

However, in the wake of the events of November 2003, the political life of Georgia, as reflected in the election process, is not yet fully normalized. The consolidation of the democratic election process will only be fully tested in a more competitive environment, once a genuine level of political pluralism is re-established.

The conditions in the autonomous Republic of Adjara were once again not conducive to democratic elections. Intimidation and physical abuse targeted at opposition supporters and journalists underlined the serious democratic deficit in Adjara. This situation overshadowed the progress made in the democratic election process in the rest of the country where the election took place, and created a double-standard for elections in Georgia.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) made commendable efforts to administer this election in a credible and professional manner. Some previous recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR and PACE were taken into account by the CEC, noticeably improving the election process. However, some recommendations of a more political nature, such as the lowering of the 7% threshold for allocation of parliamentary mandates, were not acted upon. The CEC at times appeared to exceed its authority, for example, extending legally established deadlines or modifying other legal provisions through decrees.

President Mikheil Saakashvili's offer to reduce from five to three the number of his appointees on some District Election Commissions (DECs) and Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) addressed concerns regarding the lack of political balance on election commissions. However, the President's concession

and consequent changes to the composition of election commissions came late in the electoral process, are not yet regulated by law, and should have also been extended to the CEC.

Of serious concern remained the failure of DEC and PECs to maintain appropriate distance from the ruling parties, and the interference of some local authorities in the lower-level commissions. A significant challenge to be addressed is the strengthening of the independence of the election authorities at all levels.

Although the dominant position of the National Movement – Democrats has led to a less pluralistic environment for this election, a total of 16 political parties and electoral blocs did contest these elections, representing a wide political spectrum and a degree of choice. With the exception of Adjara, contestants were free to campaign. However, most political parties took a passive approach, which resulted in a very low-key campaign. It was only during the final week of the campaign that parties became more active.

A wide and diverse range of media could freely cover the campaign and electoral preparations; however State TV news broadcasts focused overwhelmingly on the authorities and the parties supporting them, and failed to provide sufficient airtime for political debate and exchange of views. Adjara TV once again displayed a clear bias in favor of the Adjara authorities. Media coverage of the election process was further constrained by the lack of visible and effective campaigns on the part of most parties.

The IEOM notes the following positive elements in this election:

- Improvements to the administration of the election process;
- Enhanced professionalism and openness of the CEC;
- Commendable efforts to improve, computerize and consolidate the voter lists, although they remain incomplete;
- With exception of Adjara, a peaceful and free pre-election period, although there was a late and very limited campaign;
- Freedom of expression enjoyed by the media, with the exception of Adjara;
- Efforts made to increase the participation of national minorities in the elections, including the printing of bilingual ballot papers and voter information material;
- Improved training for lower-level election officials;
- Increased secrecy of the ballot; and
- Less police presence in and around polling stations.

However, issues of concern remain:

- A complete lack of commitment by the authorities of Adjara to guarantee sufficient conditions for the conduct of a meaningful democratic election in that area;
- The continuing lack of a clear separation between State administration and political party structures, and the ongoing potential for misuse of State administrative resources;
- Inability to ensure the balanced composition of election commissions at all levels;
- The interference by some local authorities in the functioning of a number of lower-level commissions, thereby lessening their independence;

- The failure of the State TV to provide a balanced coverage of the election campaign, and a forum for political debates with exchange of views;
- The unwillingness to lower the 7% threshold for seat allocation when constitutional amendments were recently adopted; and
- In contrast to the 2 November Parliamentary elections, a reduced scrutiny by domestic observers in the pre-election period. However, on election day domestic observers were present in substantially more polling stations than in the previous election.

On election day, voting was conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. PECs generally operated in a collegial manner and had benefited from the additional training provided by the CEC. Observers evaluated 80% of PECs visited as having good or excellent organization of the poll and understanding of the process. Election day registration occurred in about 90% of polling stations visited. In Adjara, there appears to have been less systematic irregularities, although isolated violations have been reported. Once again, problems were particularly noticeable in Marneuli, Gardabani and Tkibuli, where observers reported cases of multiple voting and ballot stuffing as well as suspiciously high turnout figures.

The institutions represented in the IEOM stand ready to continue their assistance to the Georgian authorities to address remaining shortcomings in their electoral process, in order to hold genuinely democratic elections that are fully compatible with Georgia's membership within the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and in accordance with other European standards.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background

The 28 March repeat parliamentary election concluded the election of the fourth Parliament since independence. After the flawed 2 November 2003 parliamentary elections, the Supreme Court annulled the results of the proportional component (150 of 235 seats). However, inexplicably, the results of the majoritarian component were not challenged, despite many of these being equally flawed. Therefore, only the proportional component was repeated on 28 March, together with two majoritarian contests.

Following the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze, Nino Burjanadze, the Interim President, called an extraordinary presidential election on 4 January, 2004 that demonstrated notable progress over previous elections. Mikheil Saakashvili was elected President with 96.2% of the vote. He nominated Zurab Zhvania first as State Minister, and then as Prime Minister in line with Constitutional amendments. As one of its first measures, the government launched a highly publicized and vigorous anti-corruption campaign leading to several arrests.

The political environment has changed dramatically since the November elections. The parties that led the November events – the National Movement and the Burjanadze–Democrats – consolidated their executive power and joined forces. The Citizens Union of Georgia, the former ruling party, disappeared from the political scene. The fragmented opposition attempted to consolidate itself by creating electoral blocs: the New Rights (NR) formed a coalition with Industry Will Save Georgia (IWSG) while the National Democratic Party (NDP) united with the Traditionalists.

On 6 February 2004, the Parliament passed substantial constitutional amendments, *inter alia* strengthening the position of the executive vis-à-vis Parliament and introducing the position of Prime Minister. Criticism was raised over the lack of public discussions and information on the amendments since the authorities ignored legal provisions requiring a one-month public debate before the adoption of amendments. The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe's call for further discussion, and the refinement of the proposed constitutional amendments before their adoption, were not taken into account. Subsequently, the European Parliament also raised concern on how the amendments were adopted.

The situation in Adjara remained tense. Although the state of emergency imposed since 23 November limited campaign opportunities, parties in opposition to Adjara leader Aslan Abashidze coalesced to form the "Our Adjara" movement. Relations between the Georgian government and the Adjara authorities have significantly deteriorated in recent weeks. On 14 March, President Saakashvili was denied entry into Adjara, where he intended to campaign. The Georgian government reacted by imposing sanctions on Adjara, and tensions mounted considerably. The situation was seemingly resolved after an agreement was reached during a meeting between Saakashvili and Abashidze on 18 March.

As in previous elections, voting did not take place in Abkhazia and in Java and Tskhinvali districts (South Ossetia).

The international community provided significant funding and technical assistance for the parliamentary election, mainly through the OSCE Election Assistance Program, which provided a crucial contribution to realizing this election.

Election System and Legal Framework

Parliament is elected for a four-year term and is composed of 235 deputies elected through a mixed election system, with 150 mandates allocated proportionally through national election lists, and 85 mandates through plural-majoritarian constituencies. The proportional component of the election takes place in a single constituency. Parties/blocs must obtain at least 7% of the votes to obtain mandates. In a welcome development, and in line with previous OSCE recommendations, the CEC on 23 March adopted a decree defining the calculation of the 7 % threshold. However, on the eve of the election, the Tbilisi District Court overturned the CEC Decree, thus leaving open-ended the fundamental question of how the calculation of the 7% threshold will ultimately be determined.

The Unified Electoral Code (UEC), the principle legislation governing elections, overall provides an adequate foundation for the conduct of democratic elections. However, some significant recommendations provided by international organizations have not been acted upon. The CEC also proposed a number of amendments to the UEC focusing on technical issues, but the outgoing Parliament failed to adopt them.

Election Administration

The election administration is a three-tiered structure: the Central Election Commission (CEC), 75 District Election Commissions (DECs) and some 2,860 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs).

Transitional legal provisions adopted in August 2003 concerning the composition of election commissions remained in force.

The greatest challenge faced by the CEC was the holding of elections in Adjara, where the election commissions were politically polarized and the local authorities did not willingly cooperate. The tense pre-election environment had a negative effect on electoral preparations. The CEC attempted to exert its authority over the six DEC in Adjara, e.g. the dismissal of two DEC chairs for failing to follow CEC instructions. Nevertheless, many commission members, including Chairpersons, were either loyal to the local authorities or unable to assert their independence from them. Thus, the CEC could not fully control the election process in Adjara.

In distinct contrast to the past, the authorities implemented a number of recommendations, including those enumerated below, made by the OSCE/ODIHR and PACE. For example, President Saakashvili offered to reduce from five to three the number of his appointees on DEC and PECs, but not on the CEC, thereby partly addressing concerns regarding the lack of political balance in commissions. *Ertoba* (Unity), the NDP–Traditionalists bloc and to a lesser extent the Socialist Party, benefited from this “redistribution” of commission members. However, due to the lateness of the decision, the lack of clarity about its implementation, and other ongoing changes of commission’s personnel, a degree of confusion has resulted at DEC and PEC levels. Notable improvements introduced within a short timeframe included:

- The computerization and consolidation of voter lists into a central database;
- A more streamlined and professional election apparatus at the central level;
- A willingness to hold accountable those responsible for election violations;
- The introduction of a DEC protocol that includes a matrix of PEC results, thereby enabling parties to verify the calculation of results at the district level. This may serve to deter fraud or enable identification of fraud;
- A greater emphasis on training of lower-level election officials, particularly regarding the procedures to complete results sheets (protocols);
- The introduction of ballots and voter information materials in minority languages. However, providing protocols in these languages in future elections would also be desirable;
- The adoption of a decision on the method of calculating the total number of registered voters; and
- Improved procedures for filing complaints on election day.

The CEC met frequently, generally taking decisions in a transparent manner. In many instances, the numerous decrees and other subordinate legal acts adopted by the CEC constituted improvements necessary for the proper implementation of the UEC. However, the CEC, on occasion, adopted decrees conflicting with the UEC, and could be deemed to have exceeded its authority. For example, it frequently amended legally established deadlines. However, there have been few challenges to this practice.

Apart from Adjara, prior to election day international observers expressed general confidence in lower-level commissions. Most DEC functioned efficiently, but the transparency of their work remained an issue. However, an imbalance in the nomination process existed, and the National Movement–Democrats

(NMD) enjoyed a strong majority of senior positions in DEC and PECs. In 18 districts, observers received credible allegations of bias in favor of the NMD or Revival by the DEC Chairperson.

Furthermore, the failure to maintain a clear separation in the roles and functioning of the election administration on the one hand and party activists, senior local government officials and domestic observers on the other, remained a significant obstacle to the development of a professional, impartial, and independent election administration. The new authorities should make a determined effort to address this shortcoming in advance of future elections.

Voter Registration

After the 4 January presidential election, the CEC began the consolidation of handwritten voter lists into a single computerized database. The accuracy of this data was verified, and many of the errors were eliminated. Observers expressed increased confidence in the voter lists, although the number of registered voters under-represents the number of eligible voters. Nevertheless, shortcomings were observed, including a relatively large number of entries lacking identity card numbers and concerns that some voters are registered at polling stations in places other than their official residence. Further consolidation and correction of errors should be carried out, and registers should be updated on an ongoing basis in order to maintain and improve their quality and inclusiveness.

The new printed lists were displayed publicly for a two-week period, thereby enabling citizens to recheck entries and to register to vote if they were not on the list. The CEC produced voter lists according to the language in which they were originally compiled, which increased the transparency of the process for non Georgian speaking voters. However, a shortage of staff with the appropriate skills, and relatively poor data, challenged the CEC's ability to prepare accurate lists within the deadlines foreseen, and delays occurred.

During the re-registration period, observers reported that the majority of PECs were open. However, in a significant minority of districts, most PECs were closed or did not display lists publicly. In general, procedures were followed correctly. During this period, excluding Adjara, only 20,515 additional voters were registered, thus demonstrating the passivity and lack of interest on the part of voters. This attitude persisted despite the efforts of the CEC to raise public awareness. The CEC announced 103,838 registered voters in Adjara between 8 and 21 March. Despite the request of the Adjaran authorities, the CEC decided not to extend the registration period.

Citizens were allowed to register on election day. Although not foreseen in the Election Code, this practice is justified in the current circumstances, but should not be repeated in future elections. It became incumbent on PECs to ensure that the eligibility of those citizens who registered on election day was checked properly and to follow other procedures rigidly to ensure that no multiple voting was possible. Observers noted that the residency requirement was being less rigorously applied in this election.

The voter lists in Adjara remained one of the most contentious issues of this election, with the potential to influence the outcome of the election. Following an instruction from the CEC Chairman, five DEC in Adjara transferred voter lists used for the January 2004 presidential election. While entering these records into the central database of electors, it became apparent that the quality of the data was generally

very poor. Frequently, vital information such as voters' addresses was omitted, making it impossible to produce meaningful printed voter lists. This left the CEC with no option but to begin a complete re-registration of voters. The uncertain and tense pre-election environment in Adjara affected the voter registration process there. Fearing for their security, some PEC members did not participate in the work of PECs, and some voters were dissuaded from registering.

Candidate Registration and the Campaign

Although the dominant position of the National Movement – United Democrats has led to a less pluralistic environment for this election, a total of 14 political parties and 5 electoral blocs did contest these elections, representing a wide political spectrum and a degree of choice. However, 3 parties withdrew just before election day.

The election campaign was very low-key. Although, with the notable exception of Adjara, parties were free to campaign throughout most of the country, there were few public meetings or party rallies. In marked contrast to the campaign for the 2 November elections, observers noted only a few billboards and posters, mostly put up during the last week of the campaign. However, some degree of door-to-door campaigning took place. In addition, opposition party offices in many towns were not operating. The lack of sufficient funds after the 2 November elections may partly explain the passive approach of many opposition parties. In contrast, the newly created Freedom Movement, headed by Konstantin Gamsakhurdia, son of the first President of independent Georgia, opened new branch offices, and ran an active and visible election campaign during the last 10 days.

International observers noted instances where campaign material, usually for the parties supporting the new authorities, was displayed in the premises of lower-level election commissions or in local government offices. For example, National Movement campaign material was observed in several local authority offices in the Kvemo Kartli region, and in DEC premises in Tianeti, Tkibuli, Gardabani, Liakhvi, Khoni, Ambrolauri, and Dusheti. Campaign material of the Labour Party and Ertoba were displayed in the Dusheti Culture House.

Local government officials were directly involved in campaign activities as heads of campaign staff or district party offices. Such cases include: the governor of Racha Lekhumi and Kvemo Svaneti heading the regional National Movement campaign staff; the gamgebelis (local executives) of Chugureti–Didube and Chkhorotsku and the Ambrolauri deputy gamgebeli heading the local National Movement branches; the Ambrolauri City gamgebeli holding Rightist Opposition meetings in his office; and the Gori gamgebeli being head of the Labour Party branch.

In Adjara, the situation differed significantly from the rest of Georgia. Opposition gatherings were mostly forbidden or violently suppressed and attacked by supporters of the Adjaran authorities, including a public meeting on 20 February during the visit of the Council of Europe's Secretary General, Walter Schwimmer, to Batumi. Offices of parties in opposition to the Adjaran authorities and of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were ransacked, journalists and opposition activists were assaulted, and opposition members of election commissions were intimidated. While incidents of violence and intimidation also marred previous elections in Adjara, the intensity and frequency with which they occurred this time was much higher. Overall, the environment in Adjara was once again not conducive to a meaningful democratic election.

The Media

The media operate in a pluralistic environment and enjoy freedom of expression.

State TV-1 complied with the legal provisions for allocation of free airtime (two hours every day), although these spots were transmitted well out of prime time. However, the State TV failed to provide a forum for political debates that are crucial to inform the electorate about political parties' platforms. The transmission of political spots of the "Our Adjara" movement during the pre-election campaign, making clear reference to the November events, raised concern about the impartiality of the State TV. This was all the more of concern since it was broadcast free of charge.

Outside the free airtime provided by State TV, media coverage was generally dominated by representatives of State institutions and the leading parties, while the opposition was largely ignored. State TV provided extensive and overwhelmingly positive coverage of the current authorities, allocating 46% of total airtime to the President, and 20% to government officials. Together with the time devoted to the National Movement–Democrats (14%), the pro-governmental faction received 80% of the total airtime, illustrating its lack of balanced coverage of the campaign.

Private electronic media showed a similar picture, with limited time devoted to opposition parties. Rustavi-2 devoted 38% of its news coverage to the President, about 19% to the government, and 14% to the National Movement–Democratic. On Imedi TV, their share was 30%, 22%, and 12%, respectively. As in previous elections, Adjara TV continued to provide positive and exhaustive coverage of the Adjara authorities and Revival, while allocating mostly negative coverage to the President and Georgian government officials. Moreover, the outlet confirmed its bias during the standoff between the Georgian government and the Adjara authorities, addressing the audience with alarmist propaganda.

The print media generally provided more balanced coverage than the television stations monitored by the IEOM. With few exceptions, criticism of the authorities, as well as of opposition parties, was present. The distribution of space among political forces was more balanced than on television.

The activity of some local media has reportedly been suffering from undue pressure and restrictions, often by local government officials. In Adjara, on several occasions journalists were impeded from operating freely, and even intimidated and physically assaulted.

As a result of the low-key campaign and the failure of most political parties to mount visible and effective campaigns, the media could not provide the public with comprehensive information on all aspects of the election process.

Election Disputes

Few formal complaints concerning the 28 March elections were filed with either the election administration or the courts. At the central level, the CEC received approximately a dozen complaints, two of which raised issues relating to the 28 March elections. The Tbilisi District Court, which has jurisdiction over the CEC, heard only eight cases appealing CEC decisions, two of which were admitted. The EOM monitoring of the case concerning the calculation of the 7% threshold raised serious concerns on the independence of this decision. Court cases continued in regard to the majoritarian seats at both

the appellate and the Supreme Court level, indicating the continuing problems caused by second-round contests based on the flawed 2 November elections.

While the absence of complaints could be an indication of an improved process, a lack of competitiveness and the general apathy which characterized the campaign, civil society organizations which in the past had served as a check on both the administration and political parties were less active and did not challenge a single action or omission.

Participation of National Minorities

Georgia has two large minority populations – Azeris and Armenians – and a variety of smaller national minorities; most minorities are concentrated in certain regions. There are no relevant political parties representing national minorities, but some parties included representatives of national minorities on their candidate lists. Overall, however, less than 3% of candidates belonged to national minorities, and no candidate list reflected their share of the population. On election commissions in areas where national minorities reside, they were significantly under-represented.

In addition to providing ballot papers in Azeri and Armenian in areas with a concentration of national minorities, as well as protocols in Georgian and Russian, the CEC also provided PEC manuals and voter education materials in minority languages. Some of these materials did not arrive in a timely manner, thereby reducing effectiveness. Training of election commissions has been provided in minority languages as well; however, in some instances, training in Azeri-populated areas was conducted in Russian, and commission members reportedly had comprehension difficulties.

Participation of Women in the Election Process

Georgian politics remain dominated by men, with limited representation of women in the government and political party leadership. The Speaker of the outgoing Parliament and former Interim President, Nino Burjanadze, is the woman holding the highest public office. Only 17 women (7.2%) were members of the outgoing Parliament. Out of the 73 majoritarian candidates already elected, only two are women (2.7%). In the newly created Cabinet of Ministers only four of 20 members are women, and none of the newly appointed regional governors are women.

Of a total of 2,700 candidates registered for the 28 March elections, 849 were women (31.4%). Their share on individual lists varied widely, however, between 13.3% on the National Movement–Democrats list, and 62.8% on the list of the Party of Democratic Truth. Only the list of the National Movement–Democrats list is headed by a woman.

Following recent changes to the election commission composition, one woman, nominated by the Sportive Union of Georgia, sits on the CEC. Regarding the DEC's visited by international observers, 79% of the Chairpersons and 77% of the Deputy Chairs were male, while 63% of the secretaries were women. In polling stations observed there were less chairwomen than in the previous election.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Some 30 domestic observer organizations were registered to observe this election. However, only four planned to have a large-scale observation: the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), Fair Elections Foundation (FEF), and New Generation New Initiative (NGNI, *Taoba*), while the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) concentrated on observing DEC's and a sample of PEC's. ISFED conducted a parallel tabulation of votes (PVT) enabling the public to compare it with the preliminary results announced by the CEC.

After the presidential election, FEF split from ISFED, which fragmented the domestic election observation effort and created confusion among observers. A degree of competition was observed between these two organizations in some regions. During election day, in a positive development, they held joint press conferences. These organizations had a solid reputation as impartial observers, although a few allegations to the contrary were received. Overall, the scrutiny of the election process remained limited during the pre-election period.

Election Day, Vote Count, and Tabulation

Voting was conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. PEC's generally operated in a collegial manner and had benefited from the additional training provided by the CEC, with observers evaluating 80% of PEC's visited as having good or excellent organization of the poll and understanding of the process. However, observers noted that in nearly half of all PEC's visited not all members of the PEC were present for the opening of the polling station. Observers also recorded an increase in the number of polling stations where campaign material was prominently on display compared with the previous election.

Many PEC's were unaware of the late withdrawal of three parties from the election contest, and a large number of them had not received the withdrawal stamp. This resulted in confusion and inconsistent application of marking of the withdrawn parties on ballot papers in many polling stations in most regions of the country.

Election day registration occurred in about 90% of polling stations visited. Observers noted that the residency requirement was being less rigorously applied in this election. In 48% of the polling stations visited, citizens were refused the right to vote.

Once again, voter irregularities were particularly noticeable in Marneuli, Gardabani and Tkibuli where observers reported cases of multiple voting and ballot stuffing being observed as well as suspiciously high turn out figures.

The application and verification of anti-fraud ink was once again inconsistent in many regions of the country, particularly in Kvemo Kartli (Marneuli and Rustavi), Samtskhe Javakheti, Samegrelo Zemo Svaneti and Guria. In almost 10% of cases, observers noted that inking was rarely or never checked and in nearly 7% of cases the ink was not applied. The absence of ink reduced the effectiveness of an important anti-fraud mechanism that is crucial when voters are allowed to register on election day. Observers reported cases of identical signatures on voters lists in Marneuli and Gardabani

Despite the tense atmosphere in Adjara, the process was generally well organized, except in Kobuleti. Voting was orderly with the exception of some polling stations in Kelvachauri where bussing of voters from one polling station to the other was directly observed. Unusually high numbers of voters' certificates as well as a lack of uniform application and checking of inking were reported in Khulo and Kobuleti.

The atmosphere at the count was generally positive with no violent incidents reported by observers. Observers noted a reduction in the number of unauthorized persons present inside polling stations compared to the previous election but they were more actively interfering in the process. The redesigned, more user-friendly protocols allied to the additional training provided to PECs significantly reduced the number of PECs who experienced difficulty in completing protocols.

Compared to the previous election observers reported an increase in the presence and diligence of domestic observers during both the voting and counting processes.

*This statement is also available in Georgian.
However, the English version remains the only official document.*

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mr. Bruce George, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA), was appointed as Special Coordinator by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to lead the short-term observers. Mr. Matyas Eorsi led the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) delegation, and Mr. Demetrio Volcic led the European Parliament (EP) delegation. Amb. Michael Wygant (U.S.A.) headed the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) opened in Tbilisi on 15 February with 40 experts and long-term observers deployed in the capital and 12 regional centers. On election day, the IEOM deployed some 440 short-term observers from 43 OSCE participating States, including 27 parliamentarians from the OSCE PA, 15 from PACE, and four from the European Parliament. The Council of Europe deployed an additional 21 observers. The IEOM observed voting throughout Georgia in 1,400 polling stations out of a total of 2,860, and counting was observed in some 130 polling stations. The IEOM was also present in more than 40 district election commissions to observe the tabulation of results.

The OSCE/ODIHR will issue a comprehensive report on these elections approximately one month after the completion of the election process.

The IEOM wishes to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Election Commission, and other national and local authorities for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the observation. The IEOM also wishes to express appreciation to the OSCE Mission to Georgia and other international organizations and embassies accredited in Tbilisi for their support throughout the duration of the mission.

For further information, please contact:

- Amb. Michael Wygant, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR EOM, in Tbilisi (+995-32-253 526);
- Urdur Gunnarsdottir, OSCE/ODIHR Spokesperson (+48 603 683 122); or Nicolas Kaczorowski, OSCE/ODIHR Election Adviser, in Warsaw (+48 603 793 780);
- Angus MacDonald, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in Strasbourg (+33 630 496 820);
- Jan Jooren, Press Counsellor of the OSCE PA, in Copenhagen (+45 4041 1641);
- Tim Boden, European Parliament, in Brussels (+32 475 351 948)

OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission: Kipshidze str. Block II, Building I, Tbilisi, Georgia -- Tel.: +995-32-253 526, 253 527; Fax: +995-32-253 523, E-mail: office@odih.cdn.ge