



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

REPUBLIC OF MALTA

EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
3 June 2017

OSCE/ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT

15-17 May 2017



Warsaw
23 May 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
III. FINDINGS.....	3
A. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT	3
B. ELECTORAL SYSTEM.....	4
C. LEGAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
D. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION	5
E. VOTER REGISTRATION.....	6
F. PARTY AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION.....	6
G. ELECTION CAMPAIGN	7
H. CAMPAIGN FINANCE	7
I. MEDIA.....	8
J. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS	9
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	10
ANNEX – LIST OF MEETINGS.....	11

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OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report

I. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the Permanent Mission of Malta to the OSCE to observe the upcoming early parliamentary elections scheduled for 3 June 2017, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) from 15 to 17 May. The NAM included Steven Martin, OSCE/ODIHR Senior Adviser on New Voting Technologies, and Ulvi Akhundlu, OSCE/ODIHR Election Adviser.

The purpose of the mission was to assess the pre-election environment and the preparations for the elections. Based on this assessment, the NAM recommends whether to deploy an OSCE/ODIHR election-related activity for the forthcoming elections, and if so, what type of activity best meets the identified needs. Meetings were held with officials from state institutions as well as with representatives of political parties, media, and civil society. A list of meetings is annexed to this report.

The OSCE/ODIHR would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign for its assistance in organizing the visit. The OSCE/ODIHR would also like to thank all of its interlocutors for taking the time to meet with the mission and to share their views.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 3 June, Malta will hold early parliamentary elections. The political landscape is dominated by two parties, the centre-left Labour Party and the centre-right Nationalist Party, alternating in government since the country's independence. The upcoming elections are being held amidst a series of public protests and calls by the opposition for the prime minister's resignation over allegations of corruption and misconduct concerning several senior political figures.

The parliament consists of 65 members, subject to an increase resulting from the implementation of the electoral system. Members are elected for a five-year term through proportional representation by single transferable vote. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally acknowledged that the electoral system heavily favours the two major parties and that the election of candidates from other parties is unlikely.

Since the last elections, the legislation was amended twice to further detail procedures for voting in retirement homes and hospitals and to introduce changes to party and campaign finance. While a number of previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations pertaining to political and campaign finance were addressed, most others remain unaddressed.

The elections will be administered by the Electoral Commission (EC). There are no intermediary levels between the EC and polling stations. Counting is centralized and undertaken at a national count centre. There are no provisions for out-of-country voting. Despite OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noting a partisan approach to the election administration, they expressed a high level of confidence and trust in the EC's ability to organize the elections professionally and transparently.

Voter registration is passive and voters are automatically included in the voter register. An update of the voter register is published biannually for public scrutiny. Some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed concerns regarding the accuracy of the civil registration data and voter register citing media reports and statements by political parties. While authorities acknowledged certain anomalies, they emphasized that such cases were limited and under review and should not affect the integrity of the voter registration process.

Citizens enjoying voting rights are entitled to stand as candidates either independently or as party nominees. To participate in the elections, political parties must be registered with the EC. A total of 377 nominations were put forward by five parties and two independents, with most candidates nominated in two districts. Overall, while OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors did not express concerns with the inclusiveness of the registration process, one party noted a number of challenges with the registration of its candidates.

The campaign starts after the announcement of elections and ends 24 hours before election day. While parties confirmed their ability to campaign freely, several OSCE/ODIHR NAM stakeholders expressed concerns about potential pressure on voters given the extent of party access to voter information as well as potential vote-buying through the distribution of food parcels, which had recently been highlighted in the media. Many OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors opined that the political confrontation between the two main parties would overshadow substantive debate and the campaign initiatives of smaller parties.

Party and campaign finance regulation has been significantly enhanced since the last elections, addressing a number of previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Changes include regulating donations, enhancing transparency through reporting, and establishing an independent oversight authority. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed the new regulatory system and considered it to be comprehensive, though noted that given that it is the first time for such regulations, effectiveness and the extent of party compliance is yet to be determined and there would be benefit to reviewing the legislation and its implementation after the elections.

The media landscape is pluralistic. Media freedom generally allows for a broad range of views, though this is often influenced by the two main parties that own and operate their own broadcast outlets. Broadcast media are mandated to cover the elections based on principles of impartiality and plurality of views and according to legislation and directives issued by the Broadcasting Authority. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors acknowledged that these principles are not always observed, particularly by party-owned media. While the two main parties were satisfied with their allocation of airtime, other parties expressed concern to the OSCE/ODIHR NAM that they were unfairly disadvantaged.

The legal framework concerning electoral disputes specifies administrative and judicial procedures for the resolution of various kinds of complaints. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed overall confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the electoral dispute resolution system.

OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the impartiality and professionalism of the election administration and its ability to organize elections in an effective manner. Nevertheless, most of them stated that they would welcome a potential OSCE/ODIHR observation activity for these elections, recognizing that further improvements could be made to the electoral process and that an independent, external assessment would be beneficial. All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted the high level of political polarization in the country, which, in their view, could impact on various aspects of the electoral process, including media coverage and the campaign.

Some concerns were voiced with regard to the accuracy of the voter register and some alleged potential instances of pressure on voters and vote-buying.

Few previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations have been implemented, mostly in relation to the new regulatory framework for party and campaign finance. In this regard, the electoral process could benefit from closer scrutiny, in particular on the voter registration process, the implementation of regulations on party and campaign finance and media coverage of the campaign. As interlocutors did not express concerns related to the conduct of election day procedures, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM recommends the deployment of an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for these elections.

III. FINDINGS

A. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Malta is a parliamentary republic with legislative power vested in the unicameral parliament and executive power exercised by the government, led by the prime minister. The president is elected by parliament and serves as the head of state.

Malta has essentially a two-party system, composed of the centre-left Labour Party (LP) and the centre-right Nationalist Party (NP), and this bi-partisan approach permeates through all aspects of state activities. The two parties have alternated in government since the country's independence in 1964 and no other political party has since succeeded to elect members to parliament. The last parliamentary elections were held in March 2013, during which the LP defeated the NP and formed the government.¹

On 1 May, the Prime Minister called for early elections, some nine months ahead of schedule, and the President subsequently endorsed the date of 3 June. The early elections are being held amidst a series of public protests and calls by the opposition for the prime minister's resignation over allegations of corruption and misconduct concerning several senior political figures, which have resulted in the establishment of a magisterial inquiry. In addition to the LP and NP, four other political parties will contest the elections, which all OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted as significant given the predominance of the two-party system.² The political landscape is heavily polarized, which is exemplified by the voter turnout consistently exceeding 90 per cent in recent elections.

Previously, the OSCE/ODIHR deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for the 2013 parliamentary elections. The OSCE/ODIHR EAM concluded in its final report that "the entire electoral process commanded a high level of public confidence. The campaign took place in an open and peaceful environment with no restrictions on freedoms of association or expression. However, the lack of comprehensive and effective campaign finance regulations raised certain

¹ The 2013 elections resulted in the LP winning 39 seats and the NP 30 seats. In November 2016, following a lengthy legal process, the Constitutional Court granted two additional seats to the NP following errors in the counting process during the 2013 elections. In addition, one member left the LP and formed the Democratic Party (PD).

² This includes the Democratic Alternative (DA), Malta Movement of Patriots (MPM), and *Alleanza Bidla* (AB). The PD will contest the election in a coalition with the NP.

concerns among many OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors about transparency, particularly for non-parliamentary parties.”³

B. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The parliament consists of 65 members, subject to an increase resulting from the implementation of the electoral system. Members are elected for a five-year term through proportional representation by single transferable vote (STV). Under the STV, voters preferentially rank as many candidates as they want in numerical order, including from different political parties. To be elected, a candidate must receive a specified quota of votes in the respective electoral district.⁴ The electoral system ensures that the number of seats allocated to a party is proportional to the number of first preference votes it obtained, thereby a party may be allocated additional seats to maintain proportionality.⁵ OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally acknowledged that the electoral system heavily favours the two major parties and that the election of candidates from other parties is unlikely.

The country is divided into 13 multi-mandate districts, each comprising 5 seats. The Electoral Commission (EC) is mandated to review electoral boundaries at least every five years with the last review conducted in March 2017. Due to a lack of consensus within the EC, two proposals were subsequently submitted to and adopted by parliament. While no official complaints were submitted, some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors alleged that the review process and adopted changes were politically motivated and lacked sufficient transparency and inclusivity.

C. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Parliamentary elections are primarily governed by the 1964 Constitution (last amended in 2014), the 1991 General Elections Act (last amended in 2015) and the 1939 Electoral Polling Ordinance (last amended in 2007). Specific aspects of the elections are further regulated by the 2015 Financing of Political Parties Act (FPPA), the 1931 Public Meetings Ordinance and the 1991 Broadcasting Act. Malta is party to major international and regional instruments related to the holding of democratic elections.

The OSCE/ODIHR final report on the 2013 parliamentary elections assessed the legal framework as providing a generally sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections. Since the last elections, a limited number of amendments were introduced to the General Elections Act focused on further detailing procedures for voting in retirement homes and hospitals. More significant changes were adopted regarding party and campaign finance regulation, which came into force on 1 January 2016 (see *Campaign Finance* section). While a number of previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations concerning party and campaign finance were addressed, most others remain unaddressed. A series of additional amendments to some aspects of the electoral legislation were under discussion; however, due to the early elections, these reforms efforts were suspended.

³ See previous [OSCE/ODIHR reports on Malta](#).

⁴ Seat allocation is done through a series of counts, and at the end of each one a candidate is either elected or excluded based on the number of votes received. The quota is determined by taking the number of valid votes and dividing them by the number of seats plus one.

⁵ For the 2013 parliamentary elections, the LP was allocated four extra seats. In addition, in accordance with Articles 52(1) and 56(1) of the Constitution, the parliament shall contain an odd number of members divisible by the number of districts, as long as each district elects no less than five and no more than seven members and as long as there are no less than 9 and no more than 15 districts.

Despite a previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, there are no legal provisions related to international or citizen election observation, which challenges paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.⁶ However, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM was assured full access to all stages of the electoral process in the event of an election-related activity. Political parties participating in the elections have full access to all stages of the electoral process.

D. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The EC is the permanent body responsible for the overall conduct of elections.⁷ It is composed of eight members and a Chief Electoral Commissioner. Members are appointed by the president for three-year terms upon government proposal in consultation with the opposition and traditionally equally represent the two parliamentary parties. The Chief Electoral Commissioner is appointed from among public servants by commission members. There are no women among members of the EC. In addition to EC members, parties contesting the elections can nominate two non-voting delegates.

Polling will take place in 645 polling stations located in 110 polling centres staffed by Assistant Commissioners (ACs). Counting is centralized and undertaken at a national count centre. There are no intermediary levels between the EC and polling stations. Each polling station is staffed by a minimum of three ACs, one hired directly by the EC and the other two nominated by parliamentary parties. The EC informed the OSCE/ODIHR NAM that it did not expect difficulties in recruiting and training polling and counting staff as it had already initiated a call for applications in 2016 and conducted some training activities. A special sub-committee is established for organizing voting in hospitals and retirement homes.⁸

Voters travelling abroad on election day can cast an early ballot if they apply by 26 May. There are no provisions for out-of-country voting.⁹ To facilitate the participation of citizens living abroad, the government subsidizes flights operated by Air Malta for eligible voters and their dependents.¹⁰ OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted the inefficiency of such a system and an initiative of citizens living abroad has appealed to parliament to seek a more cost-effective and inclusive alternative for future elections.

The EC envisions various measures to enhance the participation of persons with disabilities, including ensuring accessible polling stations and wheelchair-friendly voting booths, ballots in Braille (limited use) and sound-proof booths for voters with visual impairments. The EC will undertake limited voter education initiatives due to time constraints and assumes that the two main parties provide sufficient voter information. Contestants noted their overall satisfaction with the range of information and support provided by the EC.

⁶ Paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that participating States “consider the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They therefore invite observers from OSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law”.

⁷ The EC has wide ranging responsibilities, including maintaining the voter register, registering political parties, and overseeing party and campaign finance.

⁸ Voting at 30 retirement homes and hospitals will take place on 27 May and 1 June, respectively.

⁹ According to the authorities, there are some 37,000 citizens living abroad.

¹⁰ Flights are operated within established timeframes from a limited number of destinations and cost EUR 90 each. For the last referendum in 2015, it cost authorities some EUR 1.1 million to fly 1,346 citizens home to vote.

Despite OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noting a partisan approach to the election administration, they expressed a high level of confidence and trust in the EC's ability to organize the elections professionally and transparently.

E. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens over the age of 18 years by election day are eligible to vote, except those declared incompetent by a court or serving prison sentences of more than one year. In addition, a voter must reside in the country for at least 6 months during the 18 months preceding election day.¹¹

Voter registration is passive and voters are automatically included in the voter register maintained by the EC. Voters must be registered in the electoral district in which they habitually reside. The voter register is updated on the basis of civil registration data managed by Identity Malta (previously under the responsibility of the EC), which receives input from civil agencies, primarily the Public Registries of Malta and Gozo.¹² An update of the voter register is published biannually for public scrutiny. In addition, the EC is to publish a further update of the register within five days of the elections being announced.

For these elections, the voter register closed for changes on 1 May. Beyond this date, modification shall only be done by the EC based on a court decision, but not later than 14 days before election day. Decisions on corrections can be appealed to the Court of Appeals. After the deadline, the final number of voters is published. On 6 May, the EC announced the final number of voters at 341,752.

To cast a ballot, each voter must present a voting card produced by the EC. For these elections, the format of the cards was modified and includes several new security features. Police officers, accompanied by political party representatives, distribute voting cards to each voter or household. Damaged or lost cards can be replaced up to three days before election day. Some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors opined that the need for voting card was unnecessary given the introduction of biometric national identification cards and some raised concern over the integrity of the voting cards citing reports of the possibility to remove information from the cards.

Some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed concerns regarding the accuracy of the civil registration data and the voter register citing media reports and statements by political parties. Specific reference concerned potential multiple entries of citizens on the civil register as well as the inclusion of a limited number of persons on the voter register who did not comply with the residency requirement or had incorrect photos on their voting cards. While the authorities acknowledged certain anomalies, they emphasized that such cases were limited and under review and should not affect the integrity of the voter registration process.

F. PARTY AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

To participate in the elections, parties must be registered with the EC in accordance with the FFPA. Each party is required to appoint a treasurer and submit its accounts to the EC as a prerequisite for registration. Citizens enjoying voting rights are entitled to stand as candidates either independently or as party nominees. The legislation imposes further eligibility criteria - a candidate cannot be a

¹¹ According to the EC, there is no practical tool to systematically verify the residency requirement.

¹² Identity Malta is the government agency responsible for issuing national identification cards and, from February 2014 to September 2015, managed the country's transition to biometric cards. The EC retains the responsibility to manage the country's system of naming and allocating residential addresses.

publicly elected official or a member of the armed forces, hold another citizenship or a leading role in a body contracted by the government or be bankrupt, convicted or sentenced for a serious crime. While these incompatibilities are intended to prevent conflicts of interest, the OSCE/ODIHR has previously recommended to review these overly restrictive criteria.

Candidate registration started 10 days after calling the elections and lasted three days, until 13 May. Prospective candidates had to submit to the EC registration documents supported by a minimum of four registered voters in the respective electoral district along with a deposit of EUR 90. The EC reported a total of 377 nominations representing five parties and two independents, with most candidates nominated in two districts. At least one objection was filed with the EC concerning potential candidates.¹³ Overall, while OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors did not express concerns with the inclusiveness of the registration process, one party noted a number of challenges with the registration of its candidates.

The legislation does not contain provisions to promote the participation of women in elections. Representatives of the two parliamentary parties informed the OSCE/ODIHR NAM that they were nominating some 20 per cent of women candidates.

G. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The election campaign starts following the announcement of elections and ends 24 hours before election day. Legislation guarantees freedoms of association and assembly. The General Elections Act does not regulate campaigning except for prohibiting the display of election materials in public areas.

While parties confirmed their ability to campaign freely, several OSCE/ODIHR NAM stakeholders expressed concerns about potential pressure on voters given the extent of party access to voter information as well as noting potential vote-buying through the distribution of food parcels, which had recently been highlighted in the media. Parties and candidates are planning to focus campaign outreach activities via large meetings with party supporters, billboards, and banners as well as discussions and debates. Social media are used by all parties and candidates, and, due to financial constraints, are the prevailing tool employed by smaller parties. Many OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors opined that the political confrontation between the LP and NP would overshadow substantive debate and the campaign initiatives of smaller parties. The campaign is focusing on economic and social issues and corruption with an emphasis on recent allegations.

H. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance is primarily regulated by the FPPA, which introduced a number of requirements in line with previous OSCE/ODIHR and Council of Europe's Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) recommendations. These include regulating donations, enhancing transparency through reporting, and establishing an independent oversight body vested with the authority to impose sanctions.¹⁴ In 2017, the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) concluded that the authorities had implemented satisfactorily a majority of its

¹³ The AB submitted nominations for four candidates to run in at least 10 districts. The EC initially accepted three nominations, though they were subsequently challenged through a complaint by another contestant (the fourth nomination was rejected by the EC). On 17 May, the EC ruled that the three candidates were only eligible to each stand in two districts.

¹⁴ See the 2014 OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Opinion](#) on the Draft Act to regulate the formation, the inner structures, functioning and financing of political parties and their participation in elections.

recommendations on the transparency of political financing and terminated its compliance procedure.¹⁵

Contestants must open a bank account through which all campaign contributions and expenditures are to be transferred. Political parties and candidates may finance their campaigns from their own resources or donations from citizens and legal entities in form of money, goods, or services. All in-kind donations should be appraised and accounted for. The law does not provide for direct public funding of parties or contestants; however, some indirect public funding is foreseen through tax exemptions on party income, including funding through party affiliated clubs and associations.

The contribution limit to a party in a calendar year is EUR 25,000 per individual and legal entity. Anonymous donations above EUR 50 and donations on conditions of confidentiality above EUR 500 are prohibited. Some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted potential loopholes in collecting and reporting on donations through large party events that could circumvent existing regulations. Although, the law provides for a maximum expenditure of EUR 20,000 by each candidate during the campaign, it is silent on total campaign expenditure by political parties. The deadlines for submitting detailed audited campaign income and expenditure reports to the EC are 10 and 31 days after publication of election results for elected and unelected candidates, respectively. The EC is responsible to oversee campaign finance reporting assisted by contracted external auditors. The EC should review reports within 30 days of submission. Sanctions for breach of campaign finance regulations vary depending on the infraction and may include fines, deprivation of voting rights for four years and a possible withdrawal of mandates.

OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed the new party and campaign finance system and considered it to be comprehensive, though noted that given that it is the first time for such regulations, the effectiveness and extent of party compliance is yet to be determined and there would be benefit to reviewing the legislation and implementation after the elections.

I. MEDIA

The media landscape is pluralistic with TV and radio considered as the main sources of political information. Although, there are a number of print media, circulation is declining. The Internet is increasingly used as a source of information, particularly social media. Media freedom generally allows for a broad range of views, although this is often influenced by the two main political parties, which own and operate their own broadcast outlets (one TV and radio station each).¹⁶ The public broadcaster (PBS) operates two TV and three radio stations. Despite a previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, defamation and insult have not been decriminalized.

Coverage of electoral campaigns in broadcast media is primarily regulated by the 1993 Broadcasting Act. This is supplemented by directives adopted for each election by the Broadcasting Authority, a regulatory body mandated to oversee compliance of broadcast media with principles of impartiality and plurality of political views. It is also mandated to review complaints on violations of broadcasting rules and impose sanctions, including fines, based on complaints or its own monitoring of broadcasters.

¹⁵ See GRECO's [Addendum to the Second Compliance Report](#) from 24 March 2017.

¹⁶ *Net TV* and *Radio 101* are owned by the NP, *One TV* and *One Radio* are owned by the LP. In February 2017, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media released a [statement](#) urging the authorities to protect independent journalists and free expression.

The directives provide explicit rules for campaign coverage. They emphasize the importance of safeguarding balance and impartiality, including on party-owned media.¹⁷ OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors acknowledged that these principles are not always observed, particularly by party-owned media. While private outlets broadcast distinct political views that appear to provide different viewpoints, the dominance of coverage of the two main parties disadvantages smaller political parties. Several OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors acknowledged that a lack of balanced coverage can impact voters' ability to make a fully informed choice. A campaign silence period prohibits the broadcast of information and statements that are of 'a political nature' or may influence voters on election day.

Overall, the BA focuses its regulatory mandate on the PBS, and developed a detailed scheme outlining the airing of televised debates, press conferences, political spots and productions to parties contesting the elections. Paid campaign ads on broadcast media are prohibited. For these elections, the LP and NP are each granted 120 minutes of broadcasting time for airing campaign spots; other parties are each granted 20 minutes and independent candidates receive a five-minute interview. The BA will produce four debates; three involving the two major parties, and a separate one for the other parties. While the two main parties were satisfied with the allocation of airtime, the other parties expressed concern to the OSCE/ODIHR NAM that they were unfairly disadvantaged.

Print media are self-regulated through a voluntary association, the Institute of Maltese Journalists that established a Code of Ethics and an Ethics Board. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that the self-regulation mechanism was generally ineffective and insufficient to provide sufficient oversight.

J. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The legal framework concerning electoral disputes specifies administrative and judicial procedures for the resolution of various kinds of complaints. Any person or legal entity has the right to dispute decisions and activities concerning the electoral process.

Objections to candidate nominations should be filed with the EC within two days of the expiration of the deadline for receipt of nominations and the Court of Appeal examines appeals against EC decisions that uphold objections against candidate nominations. Voters can appeals against errors in voter lists with the respective civil registration bodies and the EC. The Courts of Magistrates are mandated to review requests on the revised voter register after publication and appeals against these decisions should be considered by the Court of Appeal until 14 days before election day.

The Constitutional Court is mandated to adjudicate other election-related complaints, including election results. Upon submission of a petition by any person, it can order a re-count of all or part of the ballots, or annul the elections in all or some of the districts if it finds irregularities that may have influenced the results. The Information and Data Protection Commissioner reviews complaints concerning breaches of personal data. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed overall confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the electoral dispute resolution system.

¹⁷ In the 2017 directive, while insisting on safeguarding balance and impartiality, the BA recognized that it would be "practical [...] to consider programming schedules submitted to it by the political stations in the light of Art 13(2) of the Broadcasting Act" which explicitly allows the BA to consider the output of the various broadcasting outlets as a whole when considering impartiality.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the impartiality and professionalism of the election administration and its ability to organize elections in an effective manner. Nevertheless, most of them stated that they would welcome a potential OSCE/ODIHR observation activity for these elections, recognizing that further improvements could be made to the electoral process and that an independent, external assessment would be beneficial. All OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted the high level of political polarization in the country, which, in their view, could impact on various aspects of the electoral process, including media coverage and the campaign. Some concerns were voiced with regard to the accuracy of the voter register and some alleged potential instances of pressure on voters and vote-buying.

Few previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations have been implemented, mostly in relation to the new regulatory framework for party and campaign finance. In this regard, the electoral process could benefit from closer scrutiny, in particular on the voter registration process, the implementation of regulations on party and campaign finance and media coverage of the campaign. As interlocutors did not express concerns related to the conduct of election day procedures, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM recommends the deployment of an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for these elections.

ANNEX: LIST OF MEETINGS

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Neville Aquilina, Director General, Global Issues, International Development and Economic Affairs

Maria Calleja, Director, Global Issues, International Development and Economic Affairs

Kristina Farrugia, First Secretary, International Development, Economic Affairs and European Institutions

Matthew Grima, Second Secretary, International Development, Economic Affairs and European Institutions

Electoral Commission

Joseph Church, Chief Electoral Commissioner

George Saliba, Secretary to the Electoral Commission

Police Headquarters

Mario Spiteri, Deputy Police Commissioner

Antoine Casha, Deputy Police Commissioner

Carmelo Magri, Deputy Police Commissioner

Constitutional Court/Court of Appeals

Silvio Camilleri, Chief Justice and President of the Constitutional Court, of the Court of Appeal and of the Court of Criminal Appeal

Giannino Caruana Demajo, Judge

Department of Information

Paul Azzopardi, Director

Broadcasting Authority

Martin Micallef, Chairman

Joanna Spiteri, Chief Executive

Simon Manicolo, Secretary to the Board

National Audit Office

Charles Deguara, Auditor General

Tanya Mercieca, Assistant Auditor General

Permanent Commission Against Corruption

Lawrence Quintano, Chairman

Albert Misfud, Director/Secretary

Political Parties (in alphabetical order)

Ivan Grech Mintoff, Chairman, Alleanza Bidla

Arnold Cassola, Chairman, Democratic Alternative - the Green Party

Anthony Buttigieg, Secretary, Democratic Party

Chris Cordona, Deputy Leader, Labour Party

Louis Gatt, Vice President, Head of Electoral Office, Labour Party

Nigel Vella, Communications Co-ordinator, Labour Party

Beppe Fenech Adami, Deputy Leader, Nationalist Party

Rosette Thake, Secretary General, Nationalist Party

Norman Scicluna, Chairman, Malta Movement of Patriots
Romina Farrugia Randon, Secretary, Malta Movement of Patriots

Media Representatives

John Bundy, Chief Executive Officer, Public Service Broadcaster
Charles Dalli, Deputy CEO, Public Service Broadcaster
Reno Bugeja, Manager News and Registered Editor, Public Service Broadcaster
Saviour Balzan, Editor, Malta Today