



PC.DEL/1080/04
4 November 2004

ENGLISH only

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The Netherlands Presidency of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 531
4 November 2004**

EU Statement on the presidential elections in Ukraine

The European Union has observed with particular interest the preparation of the presidential elections in Ukraine and the actual voting on 31 October 2004. The high participation of voters in the elections and the existence of an active civil society during the pre-election campaign are ample proof of the high interest of the Ukrainian people in democratic proceedings and demonstrate their understanding that these elections would be a cornerstone in the further democratic development of their country. The European Union values Ukraine as a key neighbour and partner and acknowledges Ukraine's European aspirations. As the EU has already made clear in its most recent Council conclusions, the conduct of these elections will be indicative of Ukraine's commitments to the democratic values of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and bears great significance for EU-Ukraine relations.

The European Union considers it therefore all the more regrettable that according to the preliminary findings and conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission these elections did not meet a considerable number of OSCE, Council of Europe and other European standards for democratic elections.

Instead of providing voters with comprehensive unbiased information about all candidates during the pre-election period, the campaign did not permit fair conditions for all and thus, conditions were not met to ensure the free expression of the opinion of voters in their choice of candidates.

The European Union in particular regrets the pressure reported by IEOM on voters, the hampering of free movement to campaign events, the non-respect of freedom of assembly, the biased media coverage, including through temniki (media guidelines) issued by unspecified authorities, the dissemination of inflammatory campaign material of unclear origin, the significant problems with voters lists, the insufficient number of polling stations, and the lack of transparency during tabulation.

The Presidency, therefore, calls on the Ukrainian authorities to address the deficiencies highlighted by ODIHR in time before the second round of the

elections, thus creating conditions that allow for free and fair elections enabling the Ukrainian people to elect the candidate of their own free choice.

In this context, I would like to draw your attention to the Declaration by the Presidency of the European Union on the presidential elections in Ukraine issued on 1 November 2004 in The Hague, a copy of which you will find distributed through the pigeonholes.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia¹ align themselves with this statement.

¹ Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process