



# Christmas in Ukraine

## Record number of OSCE observers monitor election

In the closing weeks of 2004 to the start of the new year, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) once again found itself in the thick of a controversial election. Following a ruling by Ukraine's Supreme Court in early December, which invalidated the second round of the presidential election on 21 November, a re-run was set for 26 December. Realizing the significance of the rescheduled poll, OSCE participating States expanded the mission's size from 600 to more than a thousand observers from 44 countries — an all-time high.

**BY URDUR GUNNARSDOTTIR**

**T**he largest OSCE election observation mission ever — a total of 1,300 personnel, including parliamentarians from the OSCE area — turned out to be nothing short of a logistical miracle. Faced with a massive administrative and co-ordination task, members of the ODIHR team in Kyiv were unfazed. They worked around the clock to fly in observers, assigning them to more than 5,800 polling stations in various parts of the country, hiring translators and drivers for each two-person team, ensuring that everybody had a place to stay in, and arranging their return to Kyiv and their onward journey.

Fortunately, the only venue that was large enough to hold briefings for the whole group was available — Ukraine's aeronauti-

cal institute. ODIHR experts described the nuances of legislative and administrative matters, a media analyst presented the findings of an extensive, four-month monitoring of the national media, and a political analyst sketched the political landscape. Steering the whole operation was the former Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Geert-Hinrich Ahrens of Germany, who delivered a message of appreciation and encouragement and gave other practical instructions.

On Christmas eve, packed buses and trains took observers to every corner of the country. They lost no time in familiarizing themselves with their assigned locations, checking out polling stations and making preparations for the big day. Pizzas and sandwiches were the holiday fare for most. Mindful of the fact that many of their col-

Kyiv's Independent Square goes "orange".

Photo: ODIHR/Urdur Gunnarsdottir

leagues were missing out on a special celebration with their families, Ukrainian staff treated the 20 experts in the Kyiv team to a Christmas buffet.

Election day, 26 December, got off to a calm start. It did not take too long for the core staff in Kyiv to realize that observers all over the country were witnessing far fewer irregularities than in the previous two rounds of elections.

The following day, the mission noted in its preliminary statement that, despite the remaining shortcomings, campaign conditions were markedly fairer, observers had received fewer reports of voter intimidation, election administration was more transparent, and media coverage was more balanced. In short, the election's repeat second round had taken Ukraine substantially closer to meeting international standards.

"Building blocks have been put in place for future democratic elections in this country," said Ambassador Ahrens at a press conference. Former OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Bruce George, who headed the short-term observers, was no less upbeat: "In our judgment, the people of this great country can be truly proud that yesterday, they took a great step towards free and democratic elections."

**Urdur Gunnarsdottir is spokesperson of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.**



The *Kyiv News* of 27 December 2004 led with a picture of ODIHR Director Christian Strohal and spokesperson Urdur Gunnarsdottir getting ready to monitor the polling stations. The headline reads: "Third round is the most complicated".

## TIMELINE

The largest-ever election observation undertaking of the OSCE/ODIHR, culminating in the third and final poll on 26 December 2004, had actually begun months earlier:

**31 August 2004.** The ODIHR opens an election observation mission in Kyiv to observe the presidential election. The mission – 57 experts and long-term observers – focuses on the election campaign, the legislative framework and its implementation, the media situation, the work of the election administration and other official bodies, and the resolution of election-related disputes.



Monitors get their OSCE armbands ready.

**26 October.** Some 600 short-term observers reinforce the mission. They are joined by observers from the Council of Europe and NATO Parliamentary Assemblies, and from the European Parliament.

**31 October.** Presidential election takes place.

**1 November.** "With a heavy heart, we have to conclude that this election did not meet a considerable number of OSCE, Council of Europe and other European standards for democratic elections," says Bruce George in a statement. "The election process constitutes a step backward from the 2002 [parliamentary] elections ... Nevertheless, the very high participation of the electorate and civil society shows encouraging signs for the evolution of Ukrainian democracy."

**10 November.** The Central Election Commission announces the results. As both of the two leading candidates fall short of an absolute majority – Viktor Yanukovich having received 49.46 per cent and Viktor Yushchenko 46.61 per cent – another round of voting is scheduled.



**21 November.** Second round of voting takes place.

**22 November.** Observers assess election day even less favourably than the first round. "With an even heavier heart than three weeks ago, I have to repeat the message from the first round," Bruce George says. "The Election Observation Mission concludes that the second round has failed to address election irregularities and lacked transparency. The deficiencies have not been addressed."

Emphasizing that the electoral process has not been concluded and urging transparency, especially in the tabulation of votes, Ambassador Geert-Hinrich Ahrens says: "While this was certainly a competitive election, it was not conducted on a level playing field."



Keeping vigil in freezing temperatures.

**26 November, 1 December and 6 December.**

High-level roundtables with the main political actors are held at the presidential Mariinsky Palace to help resolve the mounting crisis. OSCE Secretary General Ján Kubiš takes part at the request of the Bulgarian Chairmanship. The international mediation efforts pave the way for the repeat of the second election.

**26 December.** The second round of voting is repeated.



A Ukrainian citizen makes her voice heard.

**27 December.** The OSCE/ODIHR mission announces in a preliminary statement that the repeat second round has taken Ukraine substantially closer to meeting international standards.

**10 January 2005.** The Central Election Commission announces that Viktor Yushchenko has won the repeat second run-off, after he registers as leading by 8 percentage points.

**23 January.** Viktor Yushchenko is sworn in as president. Guests include Chairman-in-Office Dimitrij Rupel and Secretary General Ján Kubiš.



Ukraine inaugurates its new head of state, 23 January.