



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

REPUBLIC OF FINLAND
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
18 March 2007

OSCE/ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT

29 January – 1 February 2007



Warsaw
22 February 2007

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OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report

I. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation¹ from the Permanent Mission of Finland to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to observe the 18 March 2007 elections to the Parliament of Finland, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) from 29 January to 1 February 2007. The purpose of the OSCE/ODIHR NAM was to assess the pre-electoral environment and the preparations for the election, in line with OSCE commitments, and to make recommendations regarding any potential OSCE/ODIHR activity in relation to the upcoming elections.

The Needs Assessment Mission included Mr. Gerald Mitchell, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Department, Mr. Vadim Zhdanovich, OSCE/ODIHR Senior Election Adviser, and Ms. Tatyana Bogussevich, OSCE/ODIHR Election Adviser.

The OSCE/ODIHR is grateful to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland for its assistance and co-operation in organizing the NAM. The OSCE/ODIHR would also like to thank the Ministry of Justice as well as the representatives of election committees, political parties, media, civil society and the diplomatic community who took the time to meet with the NAM. The list of meetings is attached to this report.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Parliament of Finland is unicameral and comprises 200 representatives elected for a four-year term from fifteen multi-seat electoral districts² on the third Sunday of March in the election year. The 18 March 2007 elections mark the centennial of parliamentary tradition in Finland following the approval of the Parliamentary Act and the Election Act in 1906 and the first parliamentary elections held in 1907.

Representatives are elected through a regional proportional list system without a threshold, characterized by a strong majoritarian element, as each voter votes for a particular candidate. It is only through the candidate of choice that a vote is attributed to the respective electoral subject.

Election officials and representatives of political parties informed the NAM about the ongoing public discussion regarding the possible need to re-draw electoral district

¹ In a statement by Ambassador Aleksi Härkönen, Permanent Representative of Finland to the OSCE, delivered at the session of the OSCE Permanent Council No. 643 on the 21 December 2006, an invitation was extended to the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and other appropriate institutions and organizations to observe this election. A specific letter of invitation was also sent by Ambassador Härkönen to ODIHR Director Ambassador Christian Strohal on 21 December 2006.

² As provided for by the Section 6 of the Constitution, one representative is always elected to the Parliament from the electoral district of Åland.

boundaries. This would be in order to diminish the possible impact of the small number of seats up for election in some districts, in relation to the proportionality of representation of parties with somewhat more limited influence.

The legislation regulating the conduct of Finnish elections has been characterized by a high degree of stability since its adoption, and has undergone only procedural revisions and amendments in 1998 and 2004 respectively. The stakeholders in the electoral process with whom the NAM met viewed the existing legal framework as comprehensive and conducive to the conduct of democratic elections.

The electoral administration of Finland, with the Ministry of Justice acting as a supreme electoral authority, enjoys an overwhelming trust by the electoral stakeholders and the apparent confidence of the electorate at-large. The multi-party composition of election commissions is regarded by the representatives of political parties as decisive in ensuring their impartiality and neutrality. All of the interlocutors with whom the NAM met expressed their confidence that the upcoming elections would be conducted in a professional and transparent manner.

The electorate in Finland has a possibility to choose from a diversity of candidates and political parties, nine of which are currently represented in the Parliament. The electoral contenders are able to compete on a level playing field and have equitable access to a broad range of both public and private media. Due to the fact that the Finnish election legislation does not stipulate a period during which a pre-electoral campaign can be conducted, most political parties have already launched their campaign activities.

Some interlocutors of the NAM expressed a degree of concern with regard to the absence of a limit on campaign expenditures and the possibility to receive funding from any source, including foreign and anonymous, unless exceeding the legal limit. Elected candidates are obliged to file declarations on the expenditures within two months following an election to the Ministry of Justice; however no verification of the submitted declarations is envisaged.

Every eligible Finnish citizen is entitled to vote during an early voting period or on polling day itself. The number of voters casting their ballots early is traditionally significant. A pilot project on the possible introduction of electronic voting is scheduled to be conducted during next year's municipal elections in three municipalities in Finland.

While a number of Finnish public associations and NGOs carry out election-related activities, they are mostly concentrated on raising awareness and encouraging participation of the electorate. The NAM was informed that there are no domestic election observer organizations in Finland, which is mostly attributed to the high level of trust in the electoral process.

On the basis of its findings, the NAM recommends that no OSCE/ODIHR election observation or assessment activity shall be undertaken in connection with the 18 March 2007 parliamentary elections. A tradition of democratic elections in Finland is accompanied by a commensurate level of public trust. All interlocutors expressed their overall confidence in the electoral process, and no immediate issues were

brought to the attention of the NAM that would necessitate OSCE/ODIHR involvement.

III. FINDINGS

A. POLITICAL CONTEXT

The 18 March 2007 elections mark the centennial of parliamentary tradition in Finland, following the approval of the Parliamentary Act and the Election Act in 1906, and the first parliamentary elections held in 1907.

Following the 2003 parliamentary elections, nine out of 19 registered political parties³ are represented in the Finnish Parliament. Finnish political parties have been traditionally relying on established segments of the electorate. The two top-scoring parties, the Centre Party and the Social-Democratic Party, and the Swedish People's Party, are members of the present coalition government.

The Centre Party claims to have the broadest membership and gets most of its support from voters in rural areas and small towns. Following the 2003 elections, it holds 55 seats in the Parliament, the highest number of any party. The party has traditionally been focusing on the issues related to social welfare, regional equality, entrepreneurship, ecologically sustainable initiatives and decentralized decision making.

The Social-Democratic Party (SDP), which is primarily supported by the urban working class, currently holds 53 seats in the Parliament. The current Finnish President, Tarja Halonen, was the SDP's winning candidate during the 2006 presidential elections. For the 2007 elections, the candidate list of the party, and the order in which the candidates will appear on the ballot, are decided through the conduct of primaries.

The third largest party, the National Coalition, is a party placing its values on free market, entrepreneurship, social welfare, equality of opportunities and high standards of education. In the campaign for the 2007 election, the National Coalition plans to emphasize employment-related issues. The 2003 parliamentary elections resulted in 42 seats for the National Coalition, but it was left out of the coalition government and is now in the opposition.

Despite the prominence of the three aforementioned parties, the proportional representation electoral system provides other parties with the opportunity of gaining seats in the legislature. Political parties represented in the Parliament include the Left Alliance, the Green League, the Christian Democrats, the True Finns and For Åland in Parliament. Taking into account the fact that voters cast their votes for specific candidates rather than simply for political parties, the campaign is mostly

³ The registration of political parties is carried out by the Ministry of Justice. Political parties seeking registration must submit signed support cards of at least 5,000 eligible voters. A party failing to gain seats in two consecutive parliamentary elections is deregistered, but may apply anew.

personalized, with candidates running their individual campaigns in addition to the ones run by their parties.

In line with the Electoral Act, independent candidates nominated by constituency associations⁴ are also allowed to stand as candidates in parliamentary elections upon submission of 1,000 support signatures. Joint lists and electoral alliances can be formed by the constituency associations and the parties respectively.

Candidate applications and party lists had to be submitted to the District Electoral Committees (DECs) by 6 February. The DECs were obliged, until 15 February, to confirm or reject the nominations. In cases of submission of incomplete applications, the candidates or their authorized representatives have the right to make corrections and provide additional materials during two days following the initial decision of the respective DEC. The representatives of political parties expressed confidence that no difficulties would be encountered in the process of candidate registration.

The Ministry of Justice estimates that over 2,000 candidates, mostly put forward by political parties, will contest the 18 March elections. The representatives of parties informed the NAM that women will constitute nearly half of the total number of candidates nominated by their parties. Women have traditionally been active participants in the political process in Finland. Finland was the first country in Europe to grant the rights to vote and to stand as candidates to women in 1906, and 19 female candidates were elected to the first Parliament in the 1907 elections.⁵ Currently, there are 77 female members of Parliament and women are well-represented in state institutions.

Approximately 260,000 young voters will be eligible to vote for the first time in the upcoming elections, however in the previous elections the participation of youth was low.⁶ The Finnish youth co-operation network *Allianssi*, an association uniting some 107 youth unions and organizations, is running a number of activities aimed at increasing the awareness and enhancing the participation of youth in the upcoming elections.

The national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. The Constitution guarantees the right of everyone to use his or her language, either Finnish or Swedish. The Sami, an indigenous people predominantly living in the northern part of the country, as well as the Roma and other groups, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. The rights of increasing numbers of immigrants and representatives of different ethnic groups are safeguarded by the 2004 Equality Act, which provides for additional guarantees for ensuring ethnic equality in the Finnish society and covers a broader range of ethnicities residing in Finland.⁷

⁴ Initiative groups of citizens registered for the specific purpose of nominating candidates, independent of other electoral subjects.

⁵ "The Breakthrough of Representative Democracy in Finland", Edita Prima Ltd, Helsinki 2006, p.18-21.

⁶ The participation of youth in elections has been dropping from 75% in 1979 to 59% in 1991 and 54% in 2003. The statistics was provided by Allianssi and relates to the group of 18-30 year olds.

⁷ According to the Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities, annually Finland receives an increasing number of immigrants, mostly of Iraqi, Somali, Russian, Roma and Estonian origin. The Equality Act applies both to recent legal immigrants and representatives of

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legislative framework of Finland provides a sound basis for democratic elections. The conduct of parliamentary elections is primarily regulated by the Electoral Act, which was adopted in 1906, merged with other election legislation into a unified electoral act in 1998, and amended only once since then, in 2004. Electoral proceedings are also regulated by the provisions of the Constitution, the Party Act and the Election Financing Act.

In line with the Electoral Act, voting rights are extended to all Finnish citizens aged 18 or older, regardless of domicile. Prisoners' voting rights are retained and they are allowed to vote early. The right to stand as a candidate is granted to eligible voters, except for individuals under guardianship and professional soldiers. The positions of the Chancellor of Justice, the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the Justice of the Supreme or Administrative Court and the Prosecutor General are also incompatible with candidacy.

The Electoral Act provides possibilities for appeals mostly after announcement of results. The only type of appeal that is permitted to be lodged during the electoral process is the appeal by a voter against a decision of a local register office on exclusion from the voter register or refusal to introduce the corrections. Such an appeal could be filed with the Provincial Administrative Court (PAC), the decision of which is final. All other appeals, including those related to candidate registration, implementation of early voting and polling day procedures⁸, can be filed with the PAC only after the announcement of electoral results. PAC decisions could be challenged in the Supreme Administrative Court within 30 days. In the event that the Court establishes that the violations "clearly affected the result of the election", repeat elections shall be called in the electoral district or municipality.

The interlocutors of the NAM explained that the prohibition of certain types of appeals before the end of the electoral process was instituted in order to ensure swift completion of the process and to prevent the use of appeals for political motives. According to NAM interlocutors, the number of appeals filed with the Supreme Administrative Court during the last parliamentary elections has been relatively low; most appeals being related to candidate registration.

The Electoral Act provides for observation of elections by representatives of political parties, alliances or joint lists, constituency associations as well as representatives of partisan or non-partisan national or international non-governmental organizations, or international organizations upon authorization from the Ministry of Justice. However, the Act does not enable accreditation of representatives of foreign governments or individual observers. The NAM was informed that there was no precedent of a domestic or an international observer organization requesting accreditation for observation of elections in Finland.

minorities that have been residing in Finland for longer periods, such as Tatars, Jews and the old Russian community.

⁸ These are explicitly prohibited during the pre-electoral period.

C. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The Parliament of Finland is unicameral and consists of 200 representatives elected for a four year term on the third Sunday of March in the election year. Representatives are elected through a regional proportional list system without a threshold. The country is divided into 15 electoral districts designed specifically for electoral purposes. Parliamentary seats are allocated, within each electoral district, proportionally to the votes cast for the respective electoral subjects on the basis of the method of d'Hondt. As the method of d'Hondt is applied separately for each electoral district and ensures proportionality within each district, proportionality of parliamentary representation for the whole country may at times be slightly distorted.

Furthermore, the electoral system is characterized by a strong majoritarian element, as each voter votes for a particular candidate. It is only through the candidate of choice that a vote is attributed to the respective electoral subject. Thus, voters' choices could prevail over political parties' personnel policies as reflected by the order of the names on the respective candidates' lists.

Generally, the procedure⁹ to determine which candidates will be elected involves two phases. One of these phases ranks the candidates in accordance with voters' preferences, while the other phase yields the numbers of seats allocated to each candidate list proportionally to the valid votes cast, through the method of D'Hondt.

Under the Electoral Act, the numbers of parliamentary seats up for election in each electoral district should be proportional to the numbers of citizens registered as residing in the districts.¹⁰ The Act describes each district by listing the municipalities included in it.¹¹ The allocation of the 200 seats up for election country-wide between the 15 electoral districts is carried out by the Council of State¹² ahead of each parliamentary election.

Electoral officials and representatives of political parties expressed their concern that due to the widely varying numbers of seats up for election in the individual electoral districts¹³, the values of the respective "effective" thresholds¹⁴ for winning a seat

⁹ The total number of votes received by each electoral subject, i.e. alliance, joint list of candidates, party and constituency association, is calculated. Further, candidates within the list of each electoral subject are ranked in the order of the numbers of votes they received. A comparative index is then assigned to each candidate. Within the list of each electoral subject, the value of the index attributed to the candidate with the highest number of votes is equal to the total number of votes received by the electoral subject; the index of the second best candidate is equal to half of the total number of votes; the index of the third best equals one third of the votes, and so on. Thus, the candidates' comparative indexes coincide with the D'Hondt's quotients. Once all candidates' indexes have been determined, the indexes are arranged in the d'Hondt's table to identify those candidates that will be awarded parliamentary seats, in line with the method of d'Hondt.

¹⁰ Electoral Act, Section 6.

¹¹ Electoral Act, Section 5.

¹² Executive power in Finland is vested in the Council of State, which is made up of the Prime Minister and the ministers of various departments of the central government as well as an ex-officio member, the Chancellor of Justice. Under the Constitution, the Prime Minister is elected by the Parliament and appointed to office by the President.

¹³ The electoral district Uusimaa has been allocated 34 seats, while Etela-Savo Pohjois-Karjala have been allocated 6 seats each.

would vary correspondingly. In the framework of an existing electoral system such an issue can be addressed only through re-districting. As re-districting is often a politically charged matter, it sparked a public debate and was considered at an informal session of the government in 2002. Due to the lack of broad agreement, the Cabinet chose to defer any decision on the matter and leave it for consideration by future governments.

Each eligible Finnish voter has a possibility to take part in voting on the day of election as well as in advance. Early voting is conducted at special early voting polling stations in Finland as well as in hospitals, social care institutions, prisons and, in specific circumstances, at the voter's residence. For the 18 March elections, early voting will also be conducted in some 250 locations abroad. The period allowed for in-country early voting is seven days, starting 11 days and finishing 5 days before election. Only four days are provided for out-of-country early voting, which finishes 8 days before election, in order to ensure timely delivery of the ballots back to Finland.

Double envelopes are used for early voting, whereas a sealed envelope with the marked ballot and an accompanying special cover letter are placed in an additional outer envelope. The cover letter contains the personal details of the voter and is signed by him or her and the election official, in confirmation of the correct implementation of voting procedures. The envelopes with ballots are separated from the cover letters at the MECs, where voters' eligibility and the integrity of sealed envelopes with ballots are verified. The sealed envelopes with ballots are then delivered to the DEC's. The envelopes are opened and early ballots are counted on the election day ahead of closure of polls.

The Electoral Act provides for the votes cast during the election day to be counted twice. The preliminary count is carried out by polling stations upon the closure of polls, which is then followed by re-count by DEC's on the morning following the election day. The results of the two counts are entered into the election information system owned by the Ministry of Justice, which has made an agreement on its technical use with a private IT-company to tabulate the final results.

The voting procedures, for both early and regular voting, require that the reverse side of a ballot marked by a voter be stamped by an electoral official before sealing the ballot in the envelope for early voting or casting the ballot in the ballot box. This procedure¹⁵ has the potential to undermine the secrecy of the vote and appears to contradict the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, according to which "*the voter should collect his or her ballot paper and no one else should touch it from that point on.*"¹⁶

While presently voting in Finland is conducted with paper ballots, under the Electronic Voting Law adopted by the Parliament in October 2006, pilot electronic voting will be conducted in three municipalities during the municipal elections in 2008. The adoption of the law followed a broad public debate and consideration of recommendations provided by the drafting committee, which was set up by the

¹⁴ An approximate value for the "effective" threshold", in percentage points, could be obtained as the quotient of 100 and the number of seats allocated to the specific district.

¹⁵ Electoral Act, Sections 60 and 77.

¹⁶ Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, I 3.2.2, §§ 34 and 35.

Ministry of Justice in 2005. Due to a high degree of trust in the existing system, the issue of introduction of electronic voting appears to be treated with great caution. Wider use of electronic voting is planned to be considered following the implementation of a pilot in 2008. However, the electoral authorities emphasized that while considering the introduction of any new voting technology, prime importance is placed on guaranteeing the secrecy of the ballot by voting in the controlled environment of a polling station.

During next year's pilot e-voting, voters will have a possibility to choose between electronic and paper ballots. The electronic voting system is Internet-based and envisages use of touch-screen machines and electronic voting cards, which are generated for each voter who has chosen the e-voting option in his or her polling station.

D. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The Ministry of Justice of Finland acts as the highest electoral authority. At the local level it is supported by 15 District Election Committees (DECs) and 416 Municipal Election Committees (MECs). Early voting is administered by some 600 early voting polling station committees and mobile early voting committees conducting early voting in social institutions, hospitals and prisons. In addition, some 2,600 polling stations will be operating on election day.

The number of voters assigned to a polling station is relatively high, ranging from 1,500 to 4,000. However, this does not appear to constitute a challenge for polling station committees due to a traditionally significant number of voters casting their votes early.¹⁷

All election committees are multi-party and are appointed on the basis of nominations from registered political parties that participated in previous parliamentary elections. Each committee consists of a chairperson, deputy chairperson, three members and the respective number of deputy members, who substitute regular members during their absence in voting procedures to achieve quorum¹⁸.

The DECs and MECs are permanent bodies appointed for a four-year term by the State Provincial Offices in each of 15 electoral districts and Municipal Councils respectively. Committees administering early and election day voting are appointed by corresponding MECs for the period of the election.

During the parliamentary elections, the MECs are mostly responsible for the technical preparations for the election as well as the intermediary handling of early electoral documents. The DECs, however, have a broader range of duties. *Inter alia*, they have the responsibility for processing of candidate applications submitted by political

¹⁷ According to the voting pattern analysis carried out by the Ministry of Justice, approximately 40 per cent of voters use the possibility of early voting.

¹⁸ Four deputy members are appointed in DECs, at least five in MECs and at least three in early and regular polling committees as well as in mobile early voting committees. Five members are necessary for a quorum in DECs and MECs, and three in other committees.

parties and constituency associations¹⁹, including the verification of signatures submitted in support of independent candidates, issuance of confirmations to successful candidates and compilation of combined lists of candidates to be used as a reference by voters on polling day.

While the Electoral Act does not stipulate what method is to be used to verify candidate support signatures, the NAM was informed that the verification is usually limited to reviewing that all necessary data of the signatories is provided.

In meetings with the NAM, all political party representatives commented positively on the existing provisions for the formation of multi-party election committees as creating an effective balance between the respective political interests, and expressed confidence that the forthcoming election will be administered in an impartial and professional manner.

In preparation for 18 March election, the Ministry of Justice has organized a number of training courses for electoral officials across the country. The Ministry has also printed and distributed operational manuals, relevant instructions and other documents to the electoral committees in Finnish, Swedish and Sámi languages. The outreach to voters will mostly be carried out through the distribution of voter information cards as well as through the conduct of an information campaign in the media closer to the day of the election.

E. VOTER REGISTER

According to the information provided by the Population Register Centre (PRC), a state-authorized private body ensuring maintenance and systematic update of the official permanent computerized population register, over 4.2 million Finnish citizens are eligible to vote in the forthcoming elections. Some 208,000 eligible voters are registered as residing abroad.

The voter register is based on the information contained in the Population Information System of the PRC, which is continuously updated on the basis of data supplied by various civil service institutions²⁰ and by the citizens directly. Registered eligible voters are automatically included in the voter register, which is extracted by the PRC for every election and made available for public inspection for over a month before the election at local PRC offices.

All voters included in the voter register receive a polling card with the information on inclusion in the register as well as on voting arrangements, including the location of polling premises, register offices and procedures for early and regular voting. Claims for correction of data are filed with local register offices and appealed in court. The voting register becomes legally valid and cannot be altered 12 days before the election unless a corresponding decision by a Provincial Administrative Court (PAC) is presented. Election day registration is not permitted.

¹⁹ Constituency associations may be established by at least 100 eligible voters registered in the constituency, in which a candidate will be running.

²⁰ The information in the population information system is regularly updated by input from some 2,000 institutions, including maternity houses, hospitals, parishes, directorate for immigration, courts, national land ownership authorities and municipal building inspection authorities.

The voter register is used for early voting, including voting abroad, in which election officials are obliged to mark the voters who have used their right to vote in order to prevent possible multiple voting. Separate voter lists are printed out from the register to be used at polling stations on election day. Only voters who have not taken part in early voting will appear on these lists.

All interlocutors of the NAM expressed their confidence in the accuracy and completeness of the voter register.

F. CAMPAIGN AND CAMPAIGN FINANCING

The election legislation of Finland does not contain any regulations on the conduct and means of the pre-electoral campaign. The Electoral Act contains no indications on the duration of the campaign, and a “silence period” is not envisaged. The representatives of some political parties informed the NAM that they have already launched their pre-election campaigns, held meetings with voters and printed electoral programs and posters of candidates.

Apart from the general state funding provided to political parties in proportion to their representation in the Parliament in line with the Party Act, most parties raise additional funds for the campaign by organizing high-level meetings and seminars and collecting admission fees. The parties are obliged to submit annual financial declarations to the Ministry of Justice. The sources of funding, however, are not itemised and are not considered by some interlocutors to be sufficiently detailed.

In the absence of legal regulations on what constitutes an electoral campaign, the distinction between the general operational expenditures of political parties and the campaign finances appears to be somewhat blurred. Under the Act on the Disclosure of Election Financing, the obligation to submit a declaration on campaign expenditures applies only to elected candidates, who are required to indicate the total cost of the campaign with sources disclosed only for donations exceeding 1,700 Euro. No other restrictions on the total amount of expenditures or sources are imposed. Anonymous donations not exceeding the above-stated amount are allowed. The law also does not provide for scrutiny of declarations submitted by elected candidates to the Ministry of Justice, while the declarations as such are classified as public information.

The interlocutors of the NAM spoke in favour of tightening the rules on disclosure of campaign financing and instituting due oversight by an authorised body.

G. MEDIA FRAMEWORK

The media landscape in Finland is diverse, with a broad range of predominantly private electronic and print media operating throughout the country. Most media focuses on the Finnish-speaking audience, however a number of television and radio stations, as well as print publications, operate or develop media products in Swedish. The newspapers are perceived to be the main means of public information reaching out to the largest audience.

The freedom of expression is enshrined in the Constitution and in the Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media. The legislation regulates the work of the media only in general terms and does not contain references to the role and duties of the media in the framework of an electoral process. The principles and the scope of election-related coverage are determined by the media itself.

A degree of oversight of the media work is carried out by the Council for Mass Media, a self-regulating committee established in 1968 for publishers and journalists in the field of mass communication. The Council's role is to develop and promote good journalistic practice and to consider cases filed with it in relation to breaches of norms of journalistic professional ethics. While the Council does not exercise legal jurisdiction, its notices and decisions are binding on the media outlets that voluntarily joined the committee. Serious offences arising from the content of the information provided to the public entail criminal liability as defined in the Penal Code of Finland.

In the run-up to the 18 March elections, the media outlets that the NAM met with are preparing a broad range of election-related programs and publications. *YLE*, the Finnish public service broadcaster, organizes several official debates, which aim to provide a platform to a wider range of political parties and electoral contenders. On election night, *YLE* also acts as the key studio from which the Ministry of Justice announces preliminary results. Private *Channel Four* and *MTV3* are organizing a number of discussions and interactive panels, to which representatives of key political parties will be invited. While mainstream political parties are generally expected to receive more prominent coverage, many media outlets emphasized their commitment to offer possibilities to other parties to take part in debates and to be featured in news broadcasts. Most media outlets informed the NAM that they carry out their activities in line with internally-developed policies, which on the one hand firmly defend editorial freedom and on the other ensure neutral, objective and balanced reporting.

Paid advertising is provided to electoral contenders by the commercial media on an equitable basis. The prices on airtime and print space were reported to be either not exceeding or, as in the case of *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper, even lower than regular commercial prices.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of its findings, the NAM recommends that no OSCE/ODIHR election observation or assessment activity be undertaken in connection with the 18 March 2007 parliamentary elections. A tradition of democratic elections in Finland is accompanied by a commensurate level of public trust. All interlocutors expressed their overall confidence in the electoral process, and no immediate issues were brought to the attention of the NAM that would necessitate OSCE/ODIHR involvement at this time. The experience of Finland in the implementation of its pilot electronic voting project during the 2008 municipal elections will be of particular interest to the OSCE/ODIHR, which maintains an interest in how such new technologies are being considered and introduced, and this could be a topic of future engagement with the electoral authorities.

ANNEX: LIST OF MEETINGS

State and Election Authorities

Ministry of Justice

Mr. Arto Jääskeläinen, Director, Electoral Administration
Mr. Heikki Liljeroos, Government Counsellor
Mr. Jussi Aaltonen, Senior Officer, Legal Affairs

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Ms. Anu Laamanen, Director, Civilian Crisis Management
Mr. Pasi Tuominen, Deputy Director, Consular Services
Ms. Johanna Suurpää, Director, Unit for Human Rights Policy
Ms. Riina-Riikka Kuparinen, Second Secretary, OSCE Desk Officer
Ms. Hanna Heikkilä, Attaché

Population Register Centre

Ms. Riita Haggrén, Director Information Services
Mr. Timo Korhonen, Manager, Elections

Helsinki District Electoral Committee

Mr. Timo Erikäinen, Chairperson

Kauniainen Municipal Electoral Committee

Mr. Thomas Berg, Chairperson
Mr. Anssi Kriikkula, Secretary

Ombudsman for National Minorities

Mr. Rainer Hiltunen, Senior Advisor

Parliament of Finland

Mr. Seppo Tiitinen, Secretary General of the Parliament
Ms. Gunilla Carlander, Counsellor of International Affairs

The Supreme Administrative Court

Mr. Lauri Tarasti, Justice

Media and media organizations

National Public Service Broadcasting Company YLE

Ms. Reija Hyvärinen

Association of Finnish Broadcasters

Mr. Juha Ourila, Media Director

Helsingin Sanomat

Mr. Antti Kokkonen, Politics Editor
Ms. Tanja Aitamurto, Journalist

Union of Journalists in Finland

Mr. Juha Rekola, Secretary for Media Policy and International Affairs

TV Channel Four

Mr. Velipekka Pekkola, Executive Producer

TV Channel MTV3

Mr. Tapani Pohjala, Managing Editor, News and Current Affairs

Political Parties

The Social Democratic Parliamentary Group

Mr. Kimmo Kiljunen, Member of the Parliament

The National Coalition Party

Mr. Jukka Manninen, Secretary for International Affairs

The Swedish People's Party

Mr. Rabbe Sandelin, Communications Officer

The Left Alliance

Mr. Erkki Snellman, Secretary General

The Centre Party

Mr. Jari Haapianen, Senior Officer, International Affairs

Civil Society

Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi

Ms. Hanna Hägglund, Coordinator, Youth Elections

Finnish League for Human Rights

Ms. Kristiina Kouroksen

The Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations "NYTKIS"

Ms. Tanja Auvinen, Secretary General

Diplomatic Community

Mr. Francisco de Miguel Álvarez, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Spain