



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION Russian Federation – Presidential Election, 18 March 2018

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The 18 March presidential election took place in an overly controlled legal and political environment marked by continued pressure on critical voices, while the Central Election Commission (CEC) administered the election efficiently and openly. After intense efforts to promote turnout, citizens voted in significant numbers, yet restrictions on the fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression, as well as on candidate registration, have limited the space for political engagement and resulted in a lack of genuine competition. While candidates could generally campaign freely, the extensive and uncritical coverage of the incumbent as president in most media resulted in an uneven playing field. Overall, election day was conducted in an orderly manner despite shortcomings related to vote secrecy and transparency of counting.

Eight candidates, one woman and seven men, stood in this election, including the incumbent president, as self-nominated, and others fielded by political parties. Positively, recent amendments significantly reduced the number of supporting signatures required for candidate registration. Seventeen prospective candidates were rejected by the CEC, and six of them challenged the CEC decisions unsuccessfully in the Supreme Court. Remaining legal restrictions on candidates rights are contrary to OSCE commitments and other international standards, and limit the inclusiveness of the candidate registration process.

Most candidates publicly expressed their certainty that the incumbent president would prevail in the election. With many of the candidates themselves stating that they did not expect to win, the election lacked genuine competition. Thus, efforts to increase the turnout predominated over the campaign of the contestants. A number of activists who questioned the legitimacy of the election were detained. Instances of pressure on voters to take part in the election were reported to the ODIHR EOM. All these violations contravene a number of OSCE commitments and other international obligations regarding freedom and equality in the campaign.

Legal and technical aspects of the election were administered efficiently and within the deadlines. The CEC held regular public sessions and undertook measures to address persistent allegations of voter coercion. Overall, lower-level commissions prepared the election efficiently, although some ODIHR EOM interlocutors questioned whether their composition impacted their impartiality and independence.

The legal framework for the presidential election is comprehensive, and recent amendments addressed some previous ODIHR recommendations. However, it remains highly complex and contains a number of restrictions, including on voter and candidate rights. A number of amendments to a dozen different laws since the 2012 presidential election limited some constitutionally guaranteed political rights and fundamental freedoms, contrary to several OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections.

Candidates must submit two financial reports to the CEC, including within one month following the publication of the election results. As required by law, the CEC published on its website the total

income and expenditures of candidates. However, as there is no requirement to disclose disaggregated campaign expenditure data, transparency of campaign finance was limited.

Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed confidence in the accuracy of voter lists. Legal changes enabling voting in a polling station other than the place of residence were a welcome step to facilitate voting, with some 5.6 million using this new mechanism. At the same time, numerous concerns were publicly expressed that it was misused to apply pressure to vote. Blanket restrictions of the right to vote of all prisoners and those recognized incapacitated by a court are at odds with paragraph 7.3 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

Television, and in particular broadcasters that are state founded, owned or supported, remains the dominant source of political information. A restrictive legislative and regulatory framework challenges freedom of the media and induces self-censorship. The media monitored by the ODIHR EOM complied with the legal requirements to air debates and provided contestants with free airtime and space. While the incumbent president did not participate in the debates or in campaigning, extensive and unchallenged news coverage of his official activities continued to provide him with dominant presence in the media, to significant advantage. Voters were thus not presented with a critical assessment of the incumbent's views and qualifications in most media. A number of media-related complaints were submitted to the CEC, primarily by the candidates, but the CEC did not provide effective remedy, rejecting all of them but one. ODIHR EOM media monitoring showed that media complied with the legal requirements to provide registered candidates and the political parties which nominated them with free airtime and space during the official media campaign period.

Overall, the process of handling election complaints lacked transparency. Out of a multitude of petitions, the CEC deemed 420 to constitute complaints, but considered only 2 of them in public sessions and subsequently published. The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that it considered the remaining complaints to be beyond its competence, as they mostly related to the misuse of administrative resources, directing them to other state authorities. Over 160 complaints were filed with the Subject Election Commissions (SECs), mostly concerning campaign materials, including distribution of leaflets calling for election boycott. The SECs ruled in a consistently restrictive manner and considered that the distribution of such materials violated the law.

The law provides for election observation by representatives of contestants, media, international observers and, following recent amendments, observers appointed by civic chambers. The CEC accredited some 1,500 international observers, and over 150,000 were fielded by civic chambers. Given the perceived association with the state authorities, observation by civic chambers does not address the continued lack of legal provisions for independent observation by citizen observers and organizations.

Overall, election day was conducted in an orderly manner, despite irregularities related to vote secrecy and procedural shortcomings that reduced transparency of counting. Tabulation was assessed rather positively, although some concerns were also reported regarding transparency of the process. During the day, the IEOM observers noted a variety of measures, some inappropriate, aimed at increasing the voter turnout, thereby confirming concerns expressed during the campaign. Voter turnout was reported by the CEC at 67.47 per cent. The IEOM observers were able to follow the process and observe freely.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background

The Russian Federation is a presidential republic. According to the 1993 Constitution, it is “a democratic federal law-bound State with a republican form of government” and the president is the head of state. The president enjoys a broad set of powers, appoints judges of federal courts, and nominates candidates for judges to the Constitutional and the Supreme Court, as well as for the office of the Prosecutor General who are then appointed by the Federation Council.¹

The 18 March presidential election was called by the decision of the Federation Council.² The incumbent President Vladimir Putin stood for his fourth term in office, following three non-consecutive terms. Four of the six political parties represented in the State Duma, including United Russia (ER) that holds a constitutional majority, endorsed his candidacy.³

Legal Framework and Electoral System

The Constitution protects the freedoms of expression, association and assembly and stipulates that laws derogating human and civil rights and freedoms must not be adopted. Restrictions may however be justified by a federal law on certain grounds – mainly for the protection of the constitutional order, morality, health and lawful interests of other people, as well as to ensure the security of the State.⁴ While some restrictions were considered by the Constitutional Court to be in line with the Constitution, freedom of assembly has effectively been curtailed by the arbitrary application of these restrictions by the authorities.⁵

A number of legal amendments introduced since the 2012 presidential election limited some constitutionally guaranteed political rights and fundamental freedoms, presenting a challenge to the

¹ The President has the powers to appoint the Chairman of the Government, with the consent of the State Duma, to form and preside the Security Council, to appoint and dismiss representatives of the Russian Federation in the Council of Federation, plenipotentiary representatives of the President, and supreme commanders of the Armed Forces, and recall, after consultations, diplomatic representatives in foreign States and international organizations. Although, under the Constitution, the edicts and regulations of the president “may not conflict with the Constitution and federal laws,” the Constitution does not impose any restrictions on the subjects of the decrees that the president may issue.

² The decision entered into force on 18 December 2017. A June 2017 amendment to the 2002 Law on the Election of the President of the Russian Federation (the Law on Presidential Election) moved the date of this presidential election from 11 to 18 March 2018.

³ Following the 2016 State Duma elections, the following parties are represented in the parliament: United Russia (ER; with 343 seats), Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF; 42 seats), Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR; 39 seats), Fair Russia (SR; 23 seats), Civic Platform (1) and Rodina (1). KPRF and LDPR nominated their own candidates.

⁴ For instance, the 2004 Law on Assemblies, Meetings, Rallies and Pickets has introduced restrictions on the right to assembly, whose compliance with the Constitution has been repeatedly challenged. In one of the latest decisions on the matter, [the Constitutional Court ruled on 14 February 2013](#) that the obligation of the organisers to submit a preliminary notice of an event is in accordance with the Constitution.

⁵ The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in 2017, in the case of [Navalny v. Russia \(29580/12\)](#), that “an unlawful situation, such as the staging of a demonstration without prior authorization, does not necessarily justify an interference with a person’s right to freedom of assembly. In particular, where irregular demonstrators do not engage in acts of violence the Court has required that the public authorities show a certain degree of tolerance towards peaceful gatherings if the freedom of assembly guaranteed by Article 11 of the Convention is not to be deprived of all substance.” The ECtHR also ruled that the courts “systematically failed to check the factual allegations made by the police, having refused the applicant’s requests for additional evidence such as video recordings to be admitted, or for witnesses to be called”. Moreover, the ECtHR noted that the courts “automatically presumed bias on the part of all witnesses who had testified in the applicant’s favour; on the contrary, the police officers were presumed to be parties with no vested interest.”

conduct of democratic elections. The 2016 so-called “Anti-terrorist Law” grants authorities broad powers to limit civil rights, withdraw citizenship, and access private telephone and email communications.⁶ Amendments to several laws passed in 2012 and 2015 require domestic non-profit organizations that receive funding from abroad, including those involved in election observation, to register as foreign agents and permit the authorities to declare foreign or international organizations as undesirable without a judicial procedure.⁷ Amendments introduced in December 2015 to the Law on the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation entitle it to declare decisions of international courts as unenforceable on the grounds of discrepancy with the Constitution.⁸

The presidential election is primarily regulated by the 1993 Constitution, the 2002 Law on Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in a Referendum (the Law on Basic Guarantees), the 2002 Law on Presidential Election, as well as the Central Election Commission (CEC) resolutions.⁹ The legal framework is comprehensive but remains highly complex, and a number of restrictions, including on voter and candidate rights, are contrary to the OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections. (*See Voter and Candidate Registration Sections*)

The legal framework was amended on several occasions since the last presidential election, most recently in December 2017, and some of the changes addressed previous ODIHR recommendations. The most significant amendments relate to voter and candidate registration, observers’ rights, and transparency measures, and introduce administrative and criminal liability for both election officials and voters for unlawful issuing and receipt of ballots.

The president is directly elected in a single nationwide constituency for a six-year period. If no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the votes cast, a second round would take place between the two candidates who gained the highest number of votes.

Election Administration

The presidential election was administered by the CEC, Subject Election Commissions (SECs), Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) and Precinct Election Commissions (PECs).¹⁰ Election commissions at all levels serve for five-year terms. The CEC consists of 15 members, with the State Duma, the upper house of parliament and the president each appointing 5 of them.¹¹ The CEC chairperson and the secretary are women. As per the CEC, 38 per cent of SEC and 63 per cent of TEC members are women. Women chair 25 per cent of SECs and 61 per cent of TECs.

⁶ The Law “On Making Amendments to Different Legal Acts of the Russian Federation Introducing Additional Measures to Counter Terrorism and Ensuring Public Security” adopted in July 2016 introduced amendments to over a dozen different laws.

⁷ On this matter, see the Council of Europe’s Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) [Opinion on Federal Law No.129-FZ on Amending Certain Legislative Acts](#). See also the Venice Commission [Opinion on Federal Law No. 121-FZ on Non-Commercial Organisations](#).

⁸ See the Venice Commission [Opinion on the Amendments to the Federal Constitutional Law on the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation from 13 June 2016](#).

⁹ Provisions of the Code of Administrative Procedure and the Code of Administrative Offences are also applicable.
¹⁰ By law, at least half of the members of SECs, TECs and PECs should represent eligible political parties, while state or municipal officials should not constitute more than half of the commission. In addition, election commissions and various public and voter associations are also entitled to nominate commission members. A number of commissions were formed on the territory of the Crimean Peninsula where the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) did not deploy observers due to the lack of consensus among the OSCE participating States regarding the status of Crimea.

¹¹ The current composition of the CEC was appointed in March 2016.

CEC sessions were regularly attended by various stakeholders, including candidates' representatives who were able to address the commission.¹² Most sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM included substantive and extensive discussions on various issues, including alleged interference by local authorities in the electoral process. Allegations of voter coercion aimed at increasing the turnout were also discussed.¹³ In response, the CEC chairperson stated that letters had been sent to governors of the regions concerned, the presidential administration and other institutions informing them of the allegations.

The CEC produced comprehensive voter information materials and video spots on various aspects of the electoral process as well as those aiming to increase the voter turnout. Some of these videos were in sign language.

Preparations by lower-level election commissions were administered efficiently and within legal deadlines. TEC sessions were held on an *ad-hoc* basis with stakeholders informed in advance, and regular publication of minutes and decisions enhanced the transparency of their work.

The ODIHR EOM noted intensive efforts of the lower-level commissions to increase voter turnout through a variety of initiatives, including formal decisions of the SECs.¹⁴ Some TECs issued special instructions or questionnaires to collect information such as voters' intention to participate, which was assessed as pressure on voters.¹⁵ PECs carried out door-to-door visits to verify voters' data in the voter lists, encouraged voters to participate and provided information on the new registration mechanism. In some regions, governors, SECs and TECs organized competitions among PECs and offered monetary or other rewards for PECs with the highest turnout.¹⁶

Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concerns that TEC and PEC members nominated by various public or voter associations represented the interests of the ruling party, which cast doubts on the independence and impartiality of election commissions that is provided for by the law and international commitments and standards.¹⁷

Voter Registration

Citizens over 18 years of age by election day, with the exception of those serving a prison term or recognized by a court as incapacitated, are eligible to vote.¹⁸ These restrictions are contrary to paragraph 7.3 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document and other international obligations and

¹² Since the announcement of the election, the CEC has conducted 35 sessions and adopted some 348 decisions and regulations on a variety of issues, including voter registration, voting procedures, printing of ballot papers, media coverage and distribution of free airtime and space. The sessions are live-streamed and archived online.

¹³ During its 142nd, 143rd, 145th and 147th sessions, the CEC chairperson stated that she was notified of allegations regarding coercion of employees and teachers in enterprises and schools whereby voters are required to register at a specific polling station, which would reportedly allow perpetrators to influence the choice of the voter.

¹⁴ For instance, see decisions of SECs in [Altai Krai](#), [Bashkortostan Republic](#), [Irkutsk](#), [Leningrad](#), [Moscow](#), [Samara](#), [Tver oblasts](#) and [Yamalo-Nenetskiy Autonomous District](#).

¹⁵ Copies of questionnaires were shared with the ODIHR EOM in: Altai Krai and Pskov oblast.

¹⁶ Such competitions were organized by the Governor's office in [Sverdlovsk](#); by SECs, as posted on their websites, in: [Chukotka](#), [Kursk](#), [Moscow](#), [Rostov](#) and [Yamalo-Nenetskiy Autonomous District](#); by TECs, as posted on their websites in: [Belgorod rayon \(Belgorod oblast\)](#), [Kadyisky rayon \(Kostroma oblast\)](#), [Kushovsky rayon \(Krasnodarsky krai\)](#), [Altai krai \(Zarinsk city\)](#).

¹⁷ Article 19.2 of the [2002 Convention on the Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms in the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States \(CIS Convention\)](#) notes that the State parties undertook an obligation "to ensure creation of independent impartial election bodies, which organize the conduct of democratic, free, fair, genuine and periodic elections in accordance with laws and independent obligations of the state."

¹⁸ The ECtHR ruled in [Anchugov and Gladkov v. Russia \(2013\)](#) that the automatic and indiscriminate removal of voting rights of persons serving a prison sentence irrespective of the nature or gravity of the offence or of their individual circumstances violates [Article 3 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#).

standards.¹⁹ Voter registration is passive and voter lists are compiled based on a registration system linked to citizens' place of residence. Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed general confidence in the accuracy of the voter lists.

Data on the number of registered voters is generated using the *GAS Vybory* system and is made public twice a year.²⁰ According to the CEC, as of 1 January 2018, there were 108,968,869 registered voters.²¹ The CEC introduced legal amendments to prevent duplicate entries in the voter list. In February 2018, the CEC passed instructions with a view to facilitating the removal of duplicates in the voter list.²² Voter lists were made available for voters to verify their individual data in person in most polling stations observed by the ODIHR EOM; voters could also do that online.²³

Following the June 2017 legislative amendments, voters can vote in a place other than their place of residence by applying for inclusion in the list of voters in a polling station of their choice starting from 45 and up to 5 days prior to the election.²⁴ Additionally, following this period and up until 14:00 on the day prior to the election, voters could submit such requests at the PEC of their place of residence by completing an application form.²⁵ According to the data published by the CEC some 5.6 million voters submitted such applications. The law requires the voter to be removed from the voter list of their place of residence for this election, either through the *GAS Vybory* system or manually.

While the majority of the ODIHR EOM interlocutors welcomed recent legislative amendments related to voting in a polling station other than the place of residence, some expressed concerns that the mechanism was misused to apply pressure to vote.²⁶

Candidate Registration

Any citizen over the age of 35 by election day with voting rights and with permanent residence for the last ten years can run for president. The right to stand is denied for individuals with a non-

¹⁹ Paragraph 7.3 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that the participating States will “guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens,” while paragraph 24 provides that restrictions on rights and freedoms must be “strictly proportionate to the aim of the law.” Paragraph 14 of the [1996 UNHRC General Comment No. 25](#) states that grounds for deprivation of voting rights should be “objective and reasonable.” See also Section I.1.1d of the [Code of Good Practice](#). The Russian Federation has signed and ratified the [2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UN CRPD\)](#). Deprivation of the right to vote on the basis of mental disability is inconsistent with Articles 12 and 29 of the UN CRPD.

²⁰ The system is a database developed for storage and exchange of information between election commissions. Since 1 July 2017, the CEC has removed 563,000 entries following a voter verification.

²¹ This figure includes a number of people residing on the Crimean Peninsula where the IEOM did not deploy observers due to the lack of consensus among the OSCE participating States regarding the status of Crimea.

²² According to the CEC, 270,000 entries of people registered twice within the territory of the Russian Federation were deleted from the voter lists distributed to the PECs. According to the CEC, TECs conducted door-to-door visits to verify the data provided by the MFA before excluding voters who are officially residing abroad. Out-of-country voting was also organized in some 400 polling stations in consulates and embassies of the Russian Federation in 145 countries.

²³ ODIHR EOM observed that voter lists were not published by the legal deadline in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Pskov, Voronezh, Samara, Kazan, Barnaul, Krasnoyarsk regions.

²⁴ Such applications could be submitted to any TEC, PEC, centers of state and municipal services, or online.

²⁵ To prevent multiple voting a two-part sticker is attached to the application. The law requires one part of the sticker to be removed and attached to the voter list in the polling station of origin and the second part to the voter list in the polling station where the voter votes. The application is invalid without the sticker.

²⁶ During the 142nd, 143rd and 147th CEC sessions, the CEC Chairperson raised this as an issue and stressed the importance of the free exercise of the will of voters. Several interlocutors reported to the ODIHR EOM that in order to secure a higher turnout, employees and teachers in enterprises and schools were coerced to submit applications to vote in the specific polling station other than their place of residence. This was reported in Rostov Oblast, St. Petersburg, Voronezh Oblast, Tatarstan Republic, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Altay Republic, Omsk Oblast.

expunged or cancelled criminal record, as well for citizens with expunged records for grave or especially grave offences for an additional period of 10 and 15 years, respectively. Restrictions on citizens with expunged record and the residency requirement are contrary to OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards.²⁷

Potential candidates can be self-nominated or stand on behalf of a political party. Self-nomination must be supported by a group of at least 500 voters. In a positive development, the legal framework governing candidate registration was amended in May 2012 to decrease the number of required supporting signatures from 2 million to 300,000 and 100,000 signatures for self-nominated candidates and those nominated by non-parliamentary political parties, respectively.²⁸ Supporting signatures are not required for candidates nominated by parliamentary parties. While this significant reduction of the number of required signatures eased the process, candidate registration remains overregulated.²⁹

Thirty-six prospective candidates, including ten women, submitted their documents to the CEC. Following the examination of documents, the CEC allowed 19 candidates to undertake signature collection.³⁰ Six cases of denial to proceed with signature collection were unsuccessfully challenged in the Supreme Court, including by an opposition activist Alexei Navalny as well as Alexander Chukhlebov, Vladimir Mikhaylov, Tristan Prisyagin, Vasiliy Pugachev, and Yuriy Sidorov.³¹ (See *Complaints and Appeals*).

Of sixteen candidates, including five women, who undertook signature collection, six were registered by the CEC as were a further two who were nominated by political parties represented in parliament. In total, eight candidates were registered by the CEC, including one woman.³²

²⁷ [Paragraph 15 of the 1996 UNHCR General Comment](#) No. 25 to Article 25 of the ICCPR states that any restrictions on the right to stand for election must be justifiable on objective and reasonable criteria and persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education or residence. Restrictions on voting rights of those with expunged criminal record are at odds with the principle of proportionality as provided by paragraph 24 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#). See also section I.1.1.1.d.iii. of the [Code of Good Practice](#), and Article 2.b of the [CIS Convention](#).

²⁸ There are 67 registered political parties – a number that increased tenfold after the registration process was simplified in 2012. However, despite repeated applications, several opposition initiatives remain unregistered, which challenges paragraph 7.6 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. Paragraph 7.6 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) mandates respect for the “right of individuals and groups to establish, in full freedom, their own political parties or other political organizations and provide such political parties and organizations with the necessary legal guarantees to enable them to compete with each other on a basis of equal treatment before the law and by the authorities.”

²⁹ Several stakeholders expressed concerns about the equality of conditions for signature collection and the transparency of the verification process. The law stipulates numerous requirements for submission of nomination applications, including a plethora of documents, such as notarized protocol of the meeting of the group of voters, income, expenditure and property declarations of both the nominee and his/her spouse for the past six years, and proof of opening an electoral fund account. All accounts in foreign banks must be closed by the time of submission of the documents.

³⁰ Grounds for not allowing prospective candidates to proceed with the signature collection included un-expunged criminal records, non-compliance with the residency requirement, and failure to have the self-nomination endorsed by a group of 500 voters.

³¹ On 23 February 2016, in the case [Navalny and Ofitserov v. Russia \(46632/13 and 28671/14\)](#) the ECtHR found that “that the criminal proceedings leading to their conviction for embezzlement had been arbitrary and unfair, and based on an unforeseeable application of criminal law. The Court found that the conviction of the applicants’ co-accused in separate accelerated proceedings had deprived the applicants of basic guarantees of a fair trial.”

³² The CEC produced candidate information posters to be displayed in polling stations. These posters include information on income and assets and all past convictions, regardless of whether or not they are expunged. The CEC updated information on the posters of four candidates: Mr. Baburin, Mr. Grudinin, Ms. Sobchak, and Mr. Titov.

Campaign Environment

The campaign period started with the nomination of candidates and ended one day before election day. Outdoor campaigning remained low-key, with a limited number of billboards and banners displayed in main population centres and alongside major roads. Candidates or their proxies held rallies and meetings with voters, often in places of work and study, and some campaigned door-to-door. Traditional and social media, as well as other online tools were used by most candidates.

The outdoor get-out-the-vote campaign was omnipresent and overshadowed the candidates' campaigns in many parts of the country.³³ Many state and private actors actively encouraged the electorate to vote. Three anonymously produced, high-quality online videos used messages with discriminatory content to urge voters to participate. Contests were organized across most regions with the same purpose. Moreover, public consultations on issues of local importance were widely held alongside the presidential vote, with some local authorities requesting enterprises to pre-register their employees to participate.³⁴ ODIHR EOM received reports on several cases of employees, students and parents of school children being pressured to take part in the election.³⁵ Such instances challenged paragraph 7.7 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.³⁶

Themes of the economy, corruption and the country's international position dominated the campaign. Although candidates generally could campaign freely, ODIHR EOM observers were informed that some local authorities did not permit some of them to hold events at their preferred place or time.³⁷ Several instances of harassment of campaign workers, including by police were reported.³⁸ Activists of the non-registered nominee Alexei Navalny, who questioned the legitimacy of the election and called for an 'electoral strike', faced numerous detentions, confiscation of materials and other measures that limited their freedom to express their views or hold peaceful

³³ Billboards, posters, electronic screens, voice announcements on public transport, SMS messages, trinkets delivered to mailboxes, notices on milk cartons, and other methods were used to encourage participation.

³⁴ Municipal authorities wishing to participate in a national urban environment renewal programme were required by the [Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities](#) to hold local votes on priority projects. As the Ministry's programme resembled a proposal in the [ER party programme](#) in the 2016 State Duma elections, some federal subject authority websites dedicated to the programme either mentioned or featured the ER party emblem, for instance in [Irkutsk oblast](#), the [Jewish Autonomous Oblast](#) and [Bashkortostan](#).

³⁵ As reported to ODIHR EOM observers in Barnaul, Belgorod, Gorno-Altaysk, Kazan, Khabarovsk, Krasnoyarsk, Kursk, Moscow, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Perm, Rostov-on-Don, Ryazan, Saint Petersburg, Serov, Tyumen, Verkhnyaya Pyshma, Vladimir, Voronezh and Yekaterinburg.

³⁶ Paragraph 7.7 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) requires that campaigning "be conducted in a fair and free atmosphere in which neither administrative action, violence nor intimidation bars the parties and the candidates from freely presenting their views and qualifications, or prevents the voters from learning and discussing them or from casting their vote free of fear of retribution". In addition, Section 54 of the [Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) treats abstention as potentially a political choice.

³⁷ Candidates are required to notify local authorities 10 to 15 days in advance, and local authorities may make alternative suggestions within a three-day period. Sobchak's campaign reported difficulties organizing events in Belgorod, Bryansk, Chelyabinsk, Kursk, Moscow, Rostov-on-Don, Saratov, Tyumen and Vologda. Grudinin's campaign in Kazan, Moscow, Novocheerkassk, Orsk, Rostov-on-Don, Saransk, Tyumen, Vladimir and Yaroslavl, as well as confiscation of campaign materials in Kursk and Voronezh and detention of campaign activists in Astrakhan. Zhirinovskiy's campaign in Gryazi, Kursk, Saint Petersburg and Saransk. Yavlinsky's campaign in Moscow, Rostov-on-Don and Saint Petersburg.

³⁸ Sobchak's campaign activists were arrested in Tikhvin. Grudinin's campaign claimed facing harassment from police in Astrakhan and Penza, and materials being confiscated or destroyed in Astrakhan, Kursk and Sverdlovsk oblast. Yavlinsky's campaign reported difficulties renting premises in Barnaul and Moscow, and its activists facing intimidation in Astrakhan oblast and Sobchak's campaign faced difficulties renting campaign venues in Moscow and Tomsk.

assembly.³⁹ Such instances contravened paragraphs 9.1 and 9.2 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.⁴⁰

Overall, the campaign was marked by a lack of genuine competition among contestants. Most of the candidates publicly admitted that they took part in the election for political promotion or to draw public attention to a specific issue, and many expressed certainty over the outcome of the election in favour of the incumbent.⁴¹ Vladimir Putin, as a candidate, did not present an election programme and limited his personal engagement in the campaign to one rally in Moscow; however, in his official position he travelled around the country and enjoyed unparalleled visibility.⁴² On 1 March, as president, he delivered a televised annual address in which he outlined his policy goals for the following six years.⁴³

Campaign Finance

The law obliges electoral contestants to open a dedicated electoral fund account for their campaign expenses and to appoint authorized representatives for financial matters. Candidates are required to submit two financial reports to the CEC, the first with the submission of their registration documents and the second within 30 days from the official publication of results.

The CEC requested five candidates to return some of the donations transferred to their electoral funds, totalling an amount of approximately 29 million RUB (approximately 414,000 EUR), mostly due to incomplete data of donors or donations by a legal entity whose foreign ownership exceeds 30 per cent.

As required by law, the CEC published on its website information on the total income and expenditures of candidates. The law does not require publishing disaggregated data about expenditures. Although the CEC cooperates with other state authorities in its effort to control the legality of the transactions made through electoral funds, it does not have investigative capacities to check transactions potentially made outside the electoral funds. This effectively limits the accountability and transparency of campaign finance.

Media

There are tens of thousands officially registered media outlets. A large number of them, including major television broadcasters, are founded, owned or supported by the state or affiliated structures,

³⁹ Detentions of activists associated with Alexei Navalny's boycott campaign were reported by ODIHR EOM observers in Lipetsk, Khabarovsk, Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Moscow, Penza, Pskov, Saint Petersburg, Slavgorod, Stary Oskol and Volgograd. Confiscation of materials or removal of displayed materials were reported in Birobidzhan, Ivanovo, Pskov, Stary Oskol, Tomsk and Vladimir. Other forms of intimidation were reported in Belgorod, Biysk, Krasnoyarsk, Kursk, Pskov, Orenburg, Rostov-on-Don, Sharypovo, Samara, Tomsk, Ufa, Volgograd and Voronezh.

⁴⁰ Paragraph 9.1 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that "everyone will have the right to freedom of expression including the right to communication. This right will include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. The exercise of this right may be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and are consistent with international standards." Paragraph 9.2 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that "everyone will have the right of peaceful assembly and demonstration. Any restrictions which may be placed on the exercise of these rights will be prescribed by law and consistent with international standards."

⁴¹ Several candidates made public statements in which they admitted that they expect the incumbent to win, including [Vladimir Zhirinovskiy](#) on 18 December 2017, [Ksenia Sobchak](#) on 15 January, [Boris Titov](#) on 6 December 2017, as well as the campaign chief for [Grigory Yavlinsky](#) on 12 March 2018.

⁴² While the legislation prohibits taking advantage of office or official position when campaigning, candidates who hold elected federal or municipal positions are not required to take leave from office to run for president.

⁴³ Rather than hold his annual speech to the parliament during 2017, the incumbent delivered the address during the election campaign.

which limits the diversity of views.⁴⁴ Television remains the dominant source of political information. The Internet, including social networks, has become an important source of political information, but primarily in urban areas.

While the Constitution provides for freedom of expression and the right to information, libel and insulting state officials remain criminal offenses. Broad anti-extremist legislation and a restrictive regulatory framework, including powers of *Roskomnadzor* to block websites without a prior court ruling, challenge freedom of the media and induce self-censorship.⁴⁵ In addition, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) has on several occasions condemned physical attacks against journalists and media outlets, and criticized proposed amendments to media legislation as disproportionate interference in the freedom of expression.⁴⁶

The media monitored by the ODIHR EOM complied with the legal requirements to provide registered candidates and the political parties which nominated them with free airtime and space during the official media campaign period.⁴⁷ Five national TV channels and three national radio stations organized numerous debates.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the format of television debates was criticized by three candidates who claimed that it did not offer a meaningful and interactive platform for discussion.⁴⁹

Most of the media monitored by the ODIHR EOM provided all candidates with regular coverage of their campaigns.⁵⁰ While all candidates were presented mostly in positive and neutral manner, national television networks presented Mr. Grudinin in a negative tone throughout the whole monitored period. In such coverage, various aspects of his candidacy and personality were questioned, often without the candidate's own opinion or a right to reply.

The incumbent president chose not to utilize free airtime dedicated to debates.⁵¹ The absence of critical viewpoints in traditional media was thus compounded by the lack of opportunity of other

⁴⁴ See reports from organisations dealing with freedom of expression, including Human Rights Watch, [Online and All Fronts](#) or [Media Sustainability Index – Russia 2017](#).

⁴⁵ The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (*Roskomnadzor*) regulates the media, including online outlets.

⁴⁶ See the OSCE RFoM statements from [29 September 2017](#), [23 October 2017](#), [22 December 2017](#) and [26 January 2018](#).

⁴⁷ The legislation provides one third of total free airtime and space to political parties that nominate candidates, thereby preserving the advantageous conditions for party-nominated candidates over those who are self-nominated. ODIHR EOM monitored prime time coverage on *First Channel*, *Russia 1* and NTV. The main news programmes of the following outlets were monitored: *Ren TV*, *TV Center (Moscow-based)*, *5th Channel (St.Petersburg-based)*, *Dozhd TV* (Internet television), and radio stations *Vesti FM* and *Echo Moskvy*. Also politics-relevant articles of the newspapers *Rossiskaya Gazeta* (state-funded daily), *Kommersant*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Vedomosti*, (private dailies) and *Argumenty i Fakty* (private weekly) were monitored. The ODIHR EOM also followed election-related coverage in the online outlets [www.iz.ru](#), [www.lenta.ru](#), [www.meduza.io](#) and [www.rbc.ru](#).

⁴⁸ The official media campaign started on 17 February, with debates aired on working days between 27 February and 15 March. There were 42 debates on television and 13 on radio stations,

⁴⁹ The debates lasted up to 50 and 40 minutes on television and radio, respectively (debates on *Russia 1* lasted 1 hour), with timeslots of up to 7 minutes per candidate. The leading broadcaster *First Channel* aired them in the early morning, starting from 08:05. Mr. Grudinin, Ms. Sobchak and Mr. Zhirinovskiy have criticized the debates.

⁵⁰ Of the total monitored coverage, The *First Channel* dedicated 8 per cent to Mr. Putin and Mr. Grudinin, 5 per cent to Mr. Zhirinovskiy, and 3 per cent to Mr. Baburin, Ms. Sobchak, Mr. Suraykin, Mr. Titov and Mr. Yavlinsky each. *Russia 1* dedicated 11 per cent of news to Mr. Grudinin, 7 per cent for Mr. Zhirinovskiy and to Mr. Putin each, and between 3 and 5 per cent to the other candidates.

⁵¹ Representatives of the incumbent president participated in debates in some of the regions.

candidates to address questions and comments to the incumbent president on his performance in office. In several cases state-funded media chose not to cover specific political events.⁵²

Outside the free airtime, television coverage was characterized by extensive and unchallenged reporting of the incumbent's official activities.⁵³ Since 5 February, *First Channel* and *Russia 1* dedicated 44 and 36 per cent of their political news coverage, to the incumbent in his capacity of a president, respectively. The coverage was exclusively positive or neutral in its tone. Some newspapers and online media monitored by the EOM provided a more measured coverage of the incumbent, thus providing the voters with a more balanced coverage of the campaign.⁵⁴

The CEC established its working group on media and conducted its own monitoring to oversee media compliance with the legal requirement to provide objective and accurate coverage of the candidates. However, the body did not provide for effective remedy. The working group highlighted the importance of objective coverage in its first session, however it declined all petitions finding them inadmissible and refused to interfere into the editorial policy of the respective media outlet. Thus, it rejected all complaints concerning biased or non-balanced coverage of Mr. Grudinin. While it rejected other complaints on extensive coverage of the incumbent, in one case the CEC recommended the *First Channel* to postpone airing of the documentary on Mr. Putin.⁵⁵

Complaints and Appeals

Voters and electoral contestants, as well as civil society organisations, observers and election commissions may challenge the actions, inactions and decisions of the election administration with the higher-level election commissions and the courts. The law provides that if an appeal is filed simultaneously with the court and the relevant election commission, the commission suspends consideration of the complaint until the court reaches a decision.⁵⁶

A large number of complaints and requests by voters, candidates and their proxies were filed with the CEC alleging electoral violations, of which over 470 concerned misuse of administrative resources. Only two complaints were considered in public sessions by the CEC and subsequently published while others were considered by individual CEC members or officials.⁵⁷ The CEC also considered most of the complaints to be beyond its competence, on the basis that they mostly related to the misuse of administrative resources and directed them to other state authorities. Overall, the process of handling election complaints lacked transparency.

In the 77 decisions of lower-level electoral commissions on complaints that the ODIHR EOM examined, the law was applied in a consistently restrictive manner. Most of these related to the distribution of leaflets calling for a boycott, or distribution of campaign material that did not include

⁵² Neither of the two leading state television channels reported on other important socio-political events such as a 16 February Supreme Court hearing of Ms. Sobchak's complaint concerning Mr. Putin's presidential term, the commemorative march for the assassination of Mr. Nemtsov or Mr. Navalny's election boycott campaign.

⁵³ Between 12 and 14 February *First Channel* aired three parts of a four-part interview-based documentary 'Putin'.

⁵⁴ Radio *Echo Moskvyy*, *Kommersant*, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, *Vedomosti* and www.rbc.ru.

⁵⁵ Several candidates and parties submitted complaints, including Mr. Grudinin, Ms. Sobchak, KPRF, and Yabloko.

⁵⁶ While the Law on Basic Guarantees and the Law on Presidential Election state that complaints against the CEC must be filed with the Supreme Court, the Code of Administrative Procedure requires CEC decisions that have been adopted by one CEC member and not by the plenary to be challenged in district courts.

⁵⁷ The two decisions related to media coverage of the campaign. A CEC Decree of 28 February 2007 imposes the obligatory publication of CEC decisions adopted in plenary.

the legally required information.⁵⁸ Some SECs considered that leaflets calling for a boycott constituted illegal campaign material as, among other issues, the information on the electoral fund was not indicated.⁵⁹ By contrast, the Central District Court of Tver ruled on 12 February that citizens are neither obliged by law to provide copies of their campaign materials to the CEC/SEC nor are they required to indicate data pertaining to an electoral fund.⁶⁰ On the same issue of dissemination of printed campaign material calling for a boycott, the Justice of Peace of Slavgorod and the District Court of Perm established that the law had been violated.

To date, some 101 complaints against CEC decisions were lodged before the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation.⁶¹ A total of 85 were rejected as inadmissible.⁶² Two cases related to the right to stand were considered. Mr. Navalny challenged the constitutionality of the restriction of the right to be elected for persons convicted to deprivation of liberty for grave and especially grave offences.⁶³ The second, by Ms. Sobchak challenged the CEC decision to register the incumbent, claiming the constitutional limit for presidential terms had been exhausted.⁶⁴ In both cases, the Supreme Court upheld the CEC decisions.

Many ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed a lack of trust in the independence and impartiality of the courts in relation to the adjudication of electoral disputes and to the examination of cases of detention and sanctions under the Code of Administrative Offences. Similarly, many ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised serious concerns about law enforcement officials in regards to respect of due process.

⁵⁸ The SECs of Rostov, Krasnoyarsk, Mari El Republic, Kaluzhskaya and Kemerovskaya oblasts and Tatarstan Republic examined several complaints filed against the distribution of the KPRF's monthly bulletin "Pravda". The January/February issue featured Grudinin, without an indication as to whether this had been paid for by the candidate's electoral fund. All SECs ordered the suspension of the bulletin's distribution and the CEC issued a warning to KPRF for violation of the electoral legislation.

⁵⁹ The SECs included: Volgogradskaya, Nizhegorodskaya, Tverskaya and Yaroslavskaya oblasts, Krasnoyarskiy krai, Republic of Mordovia and of Chuvash Republic. All SECs submitted the information to the police and requested the material be seized and charges pressed against the perpetrators.

⁶⁰ This decision is in accordance with the Constitutional Court decision of 14 November 2005, regarding a citizen distributing leaflets promoting a vote "against all" candidates, which ruled that in the absence of a formally defined procedure for the exercise by citizens of the right to conduct election campaign "against all" by using their own personal funds, the legal provisions that require a campaign to be conducted through the use of electoral funds constitute a significant restriction of the freedom of speech. Consequently, the application of the Code of Administrative Offences in sanctioning citizens for this sort of campaign is not in accordance with the Constitution. The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation followed the same reasoning in a decision of 9 October 2012 on a similar issue.

⁶¹ Among these 37 challenged the CEC's decision to register the incumbent. Six complaints by candidates challenged the CEC's decision to deny their registration on grounds, such as: self-nomination not being supported by 500 voters, lack of notification of the CEC on the meeting of the group of voters within the legal time limits and residence permit in a territory of a foreign state, The Court upheld the CEC decisions in all cases.

⁶² The Code of Administrative Procedure provides several reasons for inadmissibility of an administrative complaint to the Supreme Court, such as: the complaint being concurrently examined by another jurisdiction; the alleged violation does not directly infringe upon the applicant's rights' it cannot be proved that the contested decision or action violates the rights of the claimant; there is already a legally-binding decision of another court on the same matter.

⁶³ The Constitutional Court in its decision of 18 January 2018, found no violation of the plaintiff's constitutional rights. Navalny was convicted on 8 February 2017 by the Leninskiy District Court of Kirov to a five year suspended prison term with a trial period of one year five months and a fine of 500,000 RUB. Notably, an 18 July 2013 decision of the same court for embezzlement was quashed by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation following the 2016 judgment *Navalnyy and Ofitserov v. Russia*, that found there had been a violation of article 6 of the [ECHR](#).

⁶⁴ The Supreme Court in its decision of 16 February 2018 found that the CEC acted within the framework of its mandate and the established procedure for registering a candidate. In addition, the Supreme Court also found that the registration of Putin did not violate Sobchak's electoral rights. On appeal, the Supreme Court ruled on 26 February that the question of presidential mandate was addressed by the Constitutional Court in its decision of 1998.

Election Observation

The legislation provides for election observation by representatives of electoral contestants, media, international observers and, following the December 2017 legislative amendments, observers appointed by civic chambers.⁶⁵ While amendments now allow civic chambers to appoint observers, the law does not provide for observation by citizen observers and organizations independently of them.⁶⁶ At the same time, civic chambers did not engage in long-term election observation beyond election day.⁶⁷

While some citizen observer groups, including *Golos*, *Navalny 2018* and *Sonar*, primarily nominated their observers through electoral contestants, other groups, including *For Clean Elections* and *National Civil Monitoring*, fielded most of their observers through civic chambers.⁶⁸ Federal and regional civic chambers recruited some 150,000 observers to maximize the coverage of the country.⁶⁹ They have established a number of co-operation agreements with various public associations and civil society organizations.⁷⁰ Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed reservations about impartiality and neutrality of observers by the civic chambers due to their perceived loyalty to the state authorities.

Election Day

Overall, the election day was orderly, despite some procedural irregularities during voting and counting. As per the law, results by polling station were published on the CEC website. The CEC reported preliminary turnout of 67.47 per cent at 10:45 hrs on the day following the election.

Opening was assessed positively almost everywhere, although in 17 per cent of observations PECs did not announce the number of voters registered. The voting process was assessed as good or very good in 96 per cent of observations. Vote secrecy was at times compromised by overcrowding

⁶⁵ [The Federal Civic Chamber](#) created in 2005 is mandated to support citizens' interaction with government officials and local authorities in order to take into account the needs and interests of citizens, to protect their rights and freedoms in the process of shaping and implementing state policies, and to exercise public control over the activities of executive authorities. Of the 168 members of the federal civic chamber, 40 are appointed by the president, 85 by regional civic chambers, and 43 by public associations. Members of regional civic chambers are appointed by federal or regional governments and by civil society organizations.

⁶⁶ Paragraph 8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that participating States "consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place." Paragraph 20 of [the General Comment No. 25 to the ICCPR](#) requires that "There should be independent scrutiny of the voting and counting process." Section II.3.2.a of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that "Both national and international observers should be given the widest possible opportunity to participate in an election observation exercise."

⁶⁷ Section II.3.2.b of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that "observation must not be confined to the election day itself, but must include the registration period of candidates and, if necessary, of electors, as well as the electoral campaign."

⁶⁸ As of 6 March, the CEC did not accredit two media outlets, *Leviathan* and *Molnia*, associated with Mr. Navalny and *Golos*, respectively. According to the CEC the reasons for not accrediting *Leviathan* were deregistration by the court of the media outlet and in the case of *Molnia* incorrect information in the accreditation documents.

⁶⁹ On 30 January 2018, the CEC issued a [regulation on observation by civic chambers](#). On 2 March, the Federal Civic Chamber adopted a regulation on the recruitment of observers. Of note, the recruitment process was mostly finalized by this date. With the exception of the few civic chambers that established a clear observation methodology the system of data collection and reporting by observers fielded through the civic chambers remained largely unclear.

⁷⁰ These include student, veteran, and other public associations, with some supported by the state budget. As per the official web-site of the Presidential Grants Fund, the citizen observer group *For Clean Elections* received a [presidential grant of 9.7 million RUB](#) (approximately EUR 137,000) – the project's main objective is to increase voter turnout. The chairpersons of Kursk and Novosibirsk civic chambers were officially [registered as proxies of Mr. Putin](#).

(noted in 10 per cent of polling stations observed), inadequate layout of the voting premises (7 per cent of observations) or voters either not marking their ballots in secrecy or not folding the ballot before casting it (12 and 74 per cent of observations, respectively). Transparency of the process was assessed negatively in 6 per cent of observations, including due to restrictions on observers or them not having a clear view of the procedures (3 and 6 per cent of observations, respectively). Many polling stations were not accessible for disabled voters (43 per cent) and the layout was often not suitable for the needs of the disabled (30 per cent). IEOM observers reported a few cases of serious irregularities such as ballot box stuffing in 7 cases and group voting in 5 per cent of observations.

IEOM observers noted a variety of measures, some inappropriate, aimed at increasing the voter turnout. Observers also reported about PECs providing voters with statements confirming their participation. In addition, IEOM observers saw that public employees were transported to polling stations to vote in an organized manner. In 12 per cent of observations, persons who were not members of the PECs kept track of those who had voted. In 41 per cent of observations, additional voting events such as public consultations or contests were organized concurrently in the same premises.

Candidate observers were present in over 94 per cent of polling stations observed. They predominantly represented Mr. Putin (80 per cent of polling stations observed), and he sometimes had more than one observer present, contrary to the law. Observers fielded by civic chambers were present in 67 per cent of polling stations. Half of them were nominated by public associations, and in 10 per cent of observations, civic chamber observers were observed to represent the interest of a candidate, questioning their neutrality.

Counting was assessed negatively in 13 per cent of observations, which is of concern. Negative assessments were predominantly linked to the PECs not following the order of counting procedures (20 per cent of observations). Specifically, PECs often did not perform reconciliation procedures before the ballot boxes were opened – thus, the number of voters was not established by counting the signatures on the voter list (5 per cent), nor were the control equations in the results protocols performed (21 per cent).

IEOM observers reported that PECs disregarded mandatory procedures during the vote count, detracting from transparency. Thus, in 32 per cent of polling stations observed, PECs did not mix ballots from mobile and stationary ballot boxes and did not determine ballot validity in a consistent manner (4 and 6 per cent, respectively). In almost one quarter of observations, the PECs did not count the ballots one by one or show and announce for whom they were marked (26 per cent of observation). In more than 60 per cent of observations, PECs counted ballots from several piles simultaneously, contrary to the law. Transparency was further reduced by the fact that in 20 per cent PECs did not enter figures in the enlarged protocols during the counting process and in 43 per cent of observations the PECs did not publicly display a signed copy of the results protocol. Ballot box stuffing became evident during the count in 11 PECs.

Tabulation was assessed positively in 92 per cent of observations, which still signals some concerns. Negative assessments were often linked to inadequate premises for the reception and processing of PEC protocols (25 TECs), overcrowding that negatively affected the process (13 TECs), and lack of transparency as either not all observers present had a clear view of the process (25 TECs) or observers were restricted in their observation (20 TECs).

***The English version of this report is the only official document.
Unofficial translation is available in the Russian language.***

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Moscow, 19 March 2018 – This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is the result of a common endeavour involving the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). The assessment was made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments, Council of Europe's and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation.

Mr. Michael Georg Link was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator and to lead the OSCE short-term observer mission. Ms. Marietta Tidei headed the OSCE PA delegation. Ambassador Jan Petersen is the Head of the ODIHR EOM, deployed from 5 February.

Each of the institutions involved in this International Election Observation Mission has endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the election will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the count, tabulation and announcement of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals. The ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some eight weeks after the completion of the electoral process. The OSCE PA will present its report at its Standing Committee meeting in Berlin on 7 July 2018.

The ODIHR EOM includes 13 experts in the capital and 60 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. On election day, 481 observers from 44 countries were deployed, including long-term and short-term observers deployed by ODIHR, as well as a 101-member delegation from the OSCE PA. Opening was observed in 240 polling stations and voting was observed in some 2,300 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 221 polling stations, and the tabulation in 182 Territorial Election Commissions.

The IEOM wishes to thank the authorities for their invitation to observe the elections, and the Central Election Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the assistance. They also express their appreciation to other state institutions, political parties, media and civil society organizations, and the international community representatives for their co-operation.

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