



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Run-Up to Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 9, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Earlier last week I had the great pleasure of revisiting Ukraine. The last time I had been there was in the spring of 2004, when Ukraine was a very different country. Last week, I had an opportunity to meet with several opposition leaders and government representatives and saw firsthand how the run-up to the March 26 elections is proceeding. I was impressed favorably by all the people I met throughout the political spectrum during my visit and by their commitment to democratic ideals and to a free and fair election process.

The elections are, of course, important in that they will not only determine the composition of the next Rada but also, by extension, the next Prime Minister. However, for the United States, the most important issue is the process of the elections themselves - whether they will be conducted freely and fairly and in accordance with Ukraine's OSCE commitments.

It is for this reason that we read with great interest the Election Observation Mission's second interim report, which came out March 6. The report mirrored my own recent experiences: it notes the significant improvement in the overall political climate in Ukraine since the 2004 presidential election. Opposition parties generally have been able to conduct electoral campaigns throughout the country freely. While there have been reports of some harassment and abuse of administrative resources at the local level, they do not appear to affect the overall tenor of the campaign. And if there are indeed problems with this election I submit that they at this point tend to be logistical rather than political.

However, the interim report also notes its concern regarding the large shortage in personnel to staff the Precinct Election Commissions (PEC). This amounts to some 27,000 slots or six percent of the total. As a result, several precinct commissions are not fully functional; this could hamper election preparations. This is not a failing of the electoral commission per se, but of the political parties themselves, which should supply precinct workers.

In these last weeks before voters go to the polls, we would urge the government of Ukraine, as well as the major political parties, to do everything in their power to conduct their campaigns responsibly, to work together to resolve any issues fairly and transparently and to investigate any serious reports of voting irregularities. There are 17 days to go. All of us know many things can happen in the final days of a campaign. In this case, let us hope all those things are good.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.