

International standards unevenly implemented during local elections in Moldova

CHISINAU, 4 June 2007 – An international election observation mission monitoring the local elections in Moldova on 3 June noted that voters were given a genuine choice and that the elections were generally well administered. Other aspects of the electoral process, however, fell short of some international commitments on democratic elections.

The mission, which included nearly 200 observers under the auspices of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, cited intimidation of candidates as one of the major shortcomings.

"One of the hallmarks of a democratic election is the ability for candidates to run for office on an equal basis, free from intimidation," said Ambassador Dieter Boden, head of the ODIHR mission. "There were a number of cases throughout the country where candidates faced pressure or dismissal or suspension from their jobs as a result of their political activities."

Observers highlighted problems with candidate registration, voter lists, and the handling of complaints both by election bodies and by the courts. The media were criticized for their extensive coverage of state authorities during the campaign, thereby benefiting pro-government candidates. The mission also expressed concern about cases where local authorities failed to guarantee equal conditions for all parties and candidates.

"This election gave people an opportunity to participate in deciding the future for their local communities," said Susan Bolam, head of the Congress delegation. "The wide choice of candidates and the turnout in some parts of the country demonstrate the confidence that local democracy is generating despite a continuing bias in the media towards the government party and inconsistencies in the administration of the election."

The mission pointed out that the Central Election Commission would be much more effective if mechanisms were in place to enforce its decisions. At the same time, observers commended the Commission for the transparency and impartiality of its work.

Election day was calm, and observers assessed the voting process positively in the vast majority of polling stations visited. At the same time, secrecy of the ballot was not always ensured, and some voters were turned away in a large number of polling stations because of problems with their identification documents. In addition, observers reported a range of procedural shortcomings during the vote count.

The ODIHR election observation mission will stay in the country to continue monitoring developments prior to the second round of voting on 17 June, when it will be joined again by a delegation from the Congress.

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