

LAST UPDATED: MAY 22, 2008, 19:30 • TBILISI

OSCE Monitors Highlight “Concrete and Substantial Progress” & “Transparent Manner” of Election Administration in Parliamentary Vote

Despite problems, “election day was overall calm and assessed positively”;
monitors note media freedom, “strong engagement of civil society”

“Concrete and substantial progress” characterized the conduct of Georgia’s May 21 Parliamentary elections, said Joao Soares, the co-coordinator of the main international observer mission in Georgia. The group released its preliminary report this afternoon.

“Overall, these elections clearly offered an opportunity for the Georgian people to choose their representatives from amongst a wide array of choices,” declared the report of International Election Observation Mission (IEOM). The report noted that “election day was generally calm, and overall, voting was assessed positively by the large majority of IEOM observers.”

The observer mission noted that numerous improvements had been made to the electoral process since January’s presidential vote. It stressed that election administration “worked in a transparent manner,” that “parties were able to campaign actively,” and that “the media, in particular public TV, offered voters a diverse range of views.”

The mission’s report also highlighted problems in the electoral process, which the Government acknowledges. “The distinction between state activities and the government party’s campaign was often blurred,” it said. The monitors noted as well that there were “allegations of intimidation” and that “election commissions and courts “generally did not give due consideration to complaints.” The Government is taking these criticisms extremely seriously and intends to do everything in its power to remedy these defects by the time of the municipal elections of 2010.

“I have seen significant changes in Georgia, particularly in democratization and the electoral process,” said Bruce George, head of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation. “This process has yet to be completed, and these elections show the need for closer cooperation with the international community to push the process forward both further and faster.”

The IEOM report applauded the efforts of political stakeholders “to conduct yesterday’s parliamentary elections in line with international standards.” It said that IEOM observers assessed the voting process as good or very good in 92 per cent of polling stations visited.

“The Georgian people expressed their political will in yesterday’s elections,” said Matyas Eorsi, head of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. “They did so in the hope of putting an end to a political conflict and the start of a new dialogue between all political forces in this country,” he added. “All political forces should now commit themselves to constructive dialogue and compromise.”

In statements made on the margins of the report’s release, individual monitors also offered positive assessments of the process. “There was 100 percent transparency—if ever there was a transparent election, it was this one,” said Walburga Habsburg-Douglas, Chair of Sweden’s Delegation to the OSCE. “Even though we expect so much more from a Georgian election than we do from our own elections, everything went smoothly. The improvement has been very significant since January.”

The OSCE report also noted that Georgia’s democracy is open and fosters plural voices. “There is a vibrant civil society in Georgia with several renowned NGOs active in election observation,” the report said. Added Marie Anne Isler Beguin, head of the European Parliament delegation: “Having seen the strong engagement of civil society and especially

of the young generation in this election, I call on all political parties not to miss this opportunity for opening up real dialogue with the civil society.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Full text of the OSCE report:

http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/05/31268_en.pdf

STATEMENTS BY INDIVIDUAL INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVERS

“I observed 10 precincts in Rustavi and several more in Tbilisi. The electoral laws were fulfilled to the last letter. Even though we expect so much more from a Georgian election than we do from our own elections, everything went smoothly. There was 100 percent transparency—if ever there was a transparent election, it was this one. I was also impressed by how well trained the people who worked in the election commissions were. The improvement has been very significant since January.”

Walburga Habsburg-Douglas, Chair of Sweden’s Delegation to the OSCE

“I observed many election precincts and witnessed no serious violations. The voting procedures were held calmly in every precinct I visited. I want to declare that the election process is well organized. At the same time, I want to call on every political party to stay calm. The vote tabulation process will be crucial.”

Marie Anne Isler Béguin, Member of the European Parliament

Head of the European Parliament Observer Mission for the Parliamentary Elections

“The elections represented a clear improvement compared to the Presidential elections of January 2008. The Georgian authorities have demonstrated a remarkable commitment to a rule-based conduct of the elections. Despite a very short preparation time, they have succeeded in holding significantly well-run elections.

“Mr. Harry Lahtein, chargé d'affaires of the Republic of Estonia, observed that they “most certainly meet all the basic requirements of free and fair elections”. He concluded that many EU Member States “would be pleased to see their elections carried out with so few irregularities.”

Observer Delegation of the Embassy of Estonia

“The Secretary General of NATO declared after the Bucharest summit that NATO would observe the May 21 parliamentary elections and that Georgia would have a real chance to be granted MAP if the elections were held in a peaceful and democratic manner.

Let me declare that the voting process has been carried out peacefully.

Matyas Eorsi, Head of Delegation for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

“The parliamentary elections are well organized and taking place in peaceful conditions. No violations have been detected. Let me congratulate the Georgian people for one more step toward democracy.”

Slawomir Nitras, Member of the Polish Parliament

“I observed 9 precincts and saw no problems either with voters, or with the opposition. The voting process is very calm.

Georgia has made a very important step forward in its democratic progress.”

Henrikas Zukauskas, Member of the Lithuanian Parliament

"The parliamentary elections have been conducted democratically in Georgia.
No serious violations were observed.

Vytautas Bogusis, Member of the Lithuanian Parliament

"I want to underline that the parliamentary elections were held democratically in Georgia.
The situation is calm in every precinct and the voting process has gone serenely. Let me
congratulate the Georgian people on the very well organized elections."

Ivan Stafenec, Member of the Slovenian Parliament

"The parliamentary elections were conducted democratically.
I observed the presidential elections in Georgia as well, and I must declare that
the current parliamentary elections are better."

Sergey Podgorniy, Member of the Ukrainian Parliament