

Parliamentary elections in the Russian Federation

2 December 2007

Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO) was founded in 1991. This NGO headquartered in Budapest, has 23 member states and has participated in 20 international election observation missions so far. The Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation is one of the members.

In the preparatory phase of the international observation of the Parliamentary elections in the Russian Federation, the Russian group, in a rather biased way, produced a surprise by limiting the number of observers from the ACEEEO to a maximum of 2 people. Expressing our dissatisfaction produced no change in this viewpoint. Trusting the fact that the OSCE-ODIHR was sending numerous observers to the Russian Federation, and upholding our opposing viewpoint, our Association accepted the limitation of the number of observers and participated in the election observation.

The viewpoint of the Russians is just not properly justified, since they have participated in numerous international observation missions previously. Our Association is of the opinion that there is no close connection between the number of observers and the number of irregularities ascertained.

The failure of the negotiations between the Russian side and the OSCE-ODIHR clearly calls attention to the shortcomings of European regulation, namely it is clearly stated in the Council of Europe, that no member state of the Council of Europe has the right to limit the quantity and quality of international election observation. Consequently it has to be determined, that the expenses of observation should be covered by the sending organizations and that the member state cannot be charged for any of these expenses.

Primarily, we consider this case as a political conflict between the Russian side and the OSCE-ODIHR, and as our organization is non-political, we do not draw any professional conclusions.

We informed the Russian party about our unambiguous point of view, with a request that they release the unilateral quantity limitation of observers during the Presidential elections being held on 2 March, 2008.

Experiences of observation

The reason of European worries concerning the Russian elections stems from the different interpretation of the concept of democracy. While the generally accepted European and North-Atlantic concept of democracy is based on the unconditional and true multi-party system, the equivalence of economic properties, and the unambiguous constitutional regulation of division of power, the official doctrine of the Russian party is based on the concept of sovereign democracy. Taking into consideration that the criterion system of sovereign democracy is not elaborated properly and it is not widely known, therefore the two conceptual systems cannot be compared. The practical steps of domestic policy in Russia, especially the way the opposition parties are treated, may generate cause for a lot of debate and it does.

In the preparatory period of elections this special approach was intensified by the clear dominance of the government over the media, that cut off the chance for opportunity among parties running for elections. From the international standards point of view it was unwarranted to establish a 7%- parliamentary-threshold. The management of electoral complaints (more than 1000) may give cause for serious alarm.

As compared to previous elections the accuracy of voter registration has improved significantly.

It is worth emphasising and praising the election-related education activity: both among the public and election officials.

Technically the tallying up of votes was extremely fast. 10 million votes per hour were processed with the use of the computer-internet system.

There was not the slightest hint of any mass frauds on behalf of any electoral actors.