



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Observation Delegation to the Moldovan Presidential Elections 1996

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Presidential Elections in the Republic of Moldova - First Round 17 November 1996

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has been invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to observe the 1996 Presidential Elections in the Republic of Moldova. As a response to the invitation, ODIHR has dispatched observers from 21 OSCE participating States to Moldova starting 17 October 1996, fielding a total of 81 observers on election day. The observers came from the following countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, The Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and USA.

The ODIHR observation delegation would like to thank the OSCE Mission to Moldova, headed by Ambassador Donald C. Johnson, for allocating staff and invaluable assistance in the planning of the mission and in the actual observation work.

The two-member observer teams were deployed throughout the country. 7 teams in the North, 5 teams in the South, 10 teams in the Central regions including Chisinau and 12 in Transdniestria or along the Dniestr River, in addition to three teams covering more than one district each. The teams have visited a representative selection of polling stations both in cities and in rural areas.

The ODIHR has had a close and positive co-operation with the Central Election Commission (CEC) and with officials at all levels who provided all information requested. The Protocol Office for the observers set up jointly between the CEC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also provided valuable assistance.

When observing the last month of preparations before the elections, highest priority was given to legal and organisational issues and to the campaign itself. In general the Election Law and other laws and regulations provide a good framework for a fair process, and the electoral system is in accordance with OSCE commitments.

The nomination of candidates ceased on 17 October 1996. All candidates that presented 20,000 signatures were accepted as candidates. Three of the nine candidates held the most important political positions in the State, the Presidency, the office of the Prime Minister and the post of the Parliamentary speaker. All candidates had access to the media to present their programmes in printed media as well as on radio and television. However, the three major

candidates enjoyed most media attention. This raises the question on the extent to which the State owned media primarily supports their funding authority, and what media policy should be followed during an election campaign.

Voter registration should have been finished before the vote started. However, events on election day clearly show that many voters had not been entered in the register, even when possessing documents of residency. This implied that not only voters with voting cards from other polling stations but also a large number of ordinary voters with local residency were also entered into the supplementary lists on election day. The significant number of entries in the supplementary lists could, combined with different practice in various polling stations constitute a risk for multiple voting. On the other hand, although there is no evidence that this was done intentionally, it is recommended that in the future more effort is put into updating voter registers. In addition, more precise instruction should be given to the polling station commissions well in advance, both concerning the supplementary voter lists and the use of identification cards.

The Law on the Election of the President of the Republic of Moldova was adopted 16 May 1996, and the CEC was appointed on 12 July 1996. The CEC felt that the Law needed to be amended, and the changes were passed in the Parliament on 15 October 1996. Some changes were fairly technical, but others were of greater consequence, such as the extension of the right to vote for the residents of Transnistria.

ELECTION DAY

Despite lean funding of the Election administrative structure, positive attitude of Election Commission members has made much of the success of election day proceedings.

On polling day, the voting was generally well organised, and it was conducted in a calm and peaceful manner. Even though observers have reported isolated instances of irregularities, there is no indication of any serious or systematic violations, except on the territory controlled by Transnistrian leadership.

Some irregularities were reported during the vote, i.e. family voting, difficulties in complying with strict rules for filling out the ballot, a certain confusion in some polling stations due to overcrowding and to the general layout, and the sometimes intrusive presence of police, mayors and other officials. These issues should be addressed in future elections and, if possible, taken into account during the preparation for the second round.

The ODIHR welcomes the transparency manifested in the continuous reporting of unofficial results to the public throughout the night of the count.

TRANSNISTRIA

There are possibly as many as 450,000 voters on the left side of the river Dniestr, and giving these people a realistic opportunity to exercise their human right to vote, in line with universal human rights, has been a major concern for ODIHR as well as for the CEC. The responsibility for the situation which does not provide these voters with the same practical opportunity as other Moldovans rests solely on the authorities of Transnistria. In order to somewhat remedy this situation, the CEC designated 13 polling stations on the Moldovan controlled territory for Transnistrian voters. However this meant that these people had to travel some

distance from their home and risk harassment from the Transdniestrian authorities. Early unofficial figures show that less than 10,000 Transdniestrian voters found their way to a polling station.

Given the situation, the process would have benefited from clear and early decisions by the CEC in order to allow sufficient time for these decisions to be made public and so that no doubt could be raised on the modality of voting for eligible voters from Transdniestria.

The turnout of voters from Transdniestria was higher than in 1994, but still only 2-3% of the estimated voters exercised their right to vote. Transport had been organised by the Central Election Commission on the Moldovan controlled territory, and the ordinary transport crossing the river was supposed to work as normal. However, some incidents were reported: in Molovata Noua, buses were prevented from crossing into Transdniestrian territory and in Dubossar/Coznitsa, the so-called Transdniestrian 'border guards' checked every vehicle wanting to cross.

The polling station in the village of Vasilievca was closed after militia officers from Transdniestria came to the station and demanded that the voting be stopped. At that time 76 out of 102 registered voters had already voted.

SUMMARY

With the exception of the Transdniestrian voters, the ODIHR observation delegation feels confident that the citizens of Moldova have been able to express their will in the elections and that the results reflect the opinion of the voters on election day.

For further information please contact the OSCE/ODIHR On-site Co-ordinator, Mr Kare VOLLAN (phone: 373 2 26 19 50).

A final report will be submitted shortly.

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