



Doc. 13920

17 November 2015

Observation of the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan (4 October 2015)

Election observation report

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1. Introduction

1. At its meeting on 22 June 2015, the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly decided, subject to receiving an invitation, to observe the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan on 4 October 2015; for this purpose, it constituted an ad hoc committee composed of 20 members and also including the rapporteur of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy on “Evaluation of the Partnership for Democracy in respect of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic”. On 7 August 2015, the Assembly received the invitation from the Kyrgyz authorities to observe the parliamentary elections. On 31 August 2015, the Bureau took note of the declarations by the candidates for the observation mission confirming the absence of any conflict of interest, approved the composition of the ad hoc committee and appointed Ms Meritxell Mateu Pi (Andorra, ALDE) as its Chairperson (see Appendix 1).

2. On 4 October 2004, the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) signed a co-operation agreement. Under Article 15 of the agreement, “[w]hen the Bureau of the Assembly decides to observe an election in a country in which electoral legislation was previously examined by the Venice Commission, one of the rapporteurs of the Venice Commission on this issue may be invited to join the Assembly’s election observation mission as legal adviser”. The Bureau of the Assembly therefore invited a member of the Venice Commission to join the ad hoc committee as legal adviser.

3. The ad hoc committee operated as part of an international election observation mission which also included observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Parliament and the election observation mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE (OSCE/ODIHR).



4. The ad hoc committee met in Bishkek from 2 to 5 October 2015. Under the briefing programme appended hereto, it met with leaders and representatives of the main political parties contesting the elections, the Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission, the head of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission and his team, and representatives of civil society, international organisations and the media. The programme of the ad hoc committee's meetings is set out in Appendix 2.

5. On polling day, 4 October 2015, the ad hoc committee split into 11 teams which were deployed in Bishkek and the surrounding areas and in the localities of Kara Balta, Stepnoy, Ysyk-Köl and Chaek, Talas, Balykchy, Osh and Jalal-Abad.

6. The international election observation mission concluded that the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan were competitive and provided voters with a wide choice. Voting was transparent, and voters made their choice freely among a large number of contestants. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan needs to improve its electoral legal framework, and more particularly its implementation, to guarantee the constitutional right of all citizens to participate in elections, to improve their biometric data protection and to make strict regulations concerning their use. The transparency of election campaign and political party financing should be reinforced. The press release issued by the international election observation mission after the election can be found in Appendix 3.

2. Political context and legal framework

7. The Parliamentary Assembly observed the 2011 presidential election in the Kyrgyz Republic as part of an international election observation mission (IEOM) which concluded that "[t]he presidential election in Kyrgyzstan was conducted in a peaceful manner, but shortcomings underscored that the integrity of the electoral process should be improved to consolidate democratic practice in line with international commitments".

8. On 27 October 2011, the President of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic submitted an official request for partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The Assembly welcomed this request, the first from a country of Central Asia.

9. On 8 April 2014, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted [Resolution 1984 \(2014\)](#) on the request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly by the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic, in which it underlined the following issues relating to elections:

- holding free and fair elections in accordance with relevant international standards and improving the electoral legal framework in co-operation with the Venice Commission;
- enhancing public interest in, and awareness of, the democratic process, as well as ensuring a higher level of participation in elections and involvement of citizens in political life;
- strengthening public monitoring of elections by independent observers, including strengthening the capacities of domestic observer networks.

10. On 25 July 2015, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Almazbek Atambayev, called parliamentary elections to the Supreme Council (*Jogorku Kenesh*), which were scheduled for 4 October 2015.

11. In 2010, Kyrgyzstan adopted its new Constitution. The Venice Commission, in its 2010 opinion on the draft Constitution,¹ welcomed "the effort of the Provisional Government and the Constitutional Assembly of Kyrgyzstan aimed at drafting a new Constitution that is fully in line with democratic standards". However, it noted a number of constitutional provisions which could be further improved:

- additional measures to ensure the independence of the judiciary should be introduced into the text;
- the complex rules for the formation of the government, which could lead to various, sometimes widely differing interpretations, should be revised;
- the role of the Procuratura should be reconsidered;
- the limits of the powers of the President to issue decrees and orders could be defined in a clearer way.

1. See in this connection the [Opinion on the draft Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic](#), adopted by the Venice Commission at its 83rd plenary session (Venice, 4 June 2010; CDL-AD(2010)015).

12. The legal framework consists essentially of two laws: the 2010 Constitutional Law on Parliamentary and Presidential Elections (“the Electoral Law”), which was revised in April 2015, and the Law on Election Commissions to Conduct Elections and Referenda, which was revised in June 2015. There are also provisions dealing with electoral processes in the Code of Administrative Procedures and the Criminal Code as well as instructions and decisions issued by the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda.

13. The Electoral Law was considerably amended in 2011 and 2015. The Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR issued two joint electoral opinions respectively in 2011² and in 2014³. Despite the progress made, they expressed concerns with regard to significant limitations to certain civil and political rights. They particularly underlined the following concerns:

- the Electoral Law places limitations on the right to be a candidate for persons participating in representative government;
- certain provisions regulating the formation of election commissions at various levels could benefit from clearer delineation;
- some provisions of the Electoral Law lead to limitations on the rights to freedom of expression and association;
- the process for filing and adjudicating complaints and appeals should be revised to ensure better protection of suffrage rights;
- certain provisions do not facilitate the representation of women and persons belonging to national minorities; in particular, the rules on allocation of seats to candidates on a list should be revised and the double threshold should be reconsidered.
- the Electoral Law provides for possibilities of cancelling a candidate’s registration for a variety of reasons;
- some provisions of the Electoral Law lead to excessive control of an elected deputy’s mandate, resulting *de facto* in an imperative mandate;
- the Electoral Law provides for increased electoral deposits and continues to require both supporting signatures and electoral deposits for some candidacies;
- the Electoral Law should include effective provisions for ensuring equitable media access and coverage;
- the Electoral Law should also include effective provisions for transparency and accountability in campaign finance.

14. The amendments to the Electoral Law adopted in April 2015 provide for compulsory biometric identification of voters and the use of ballot paper scanners, streamlining of the procedures for settling electoral disputes, increased electoral deposits and higher upper limits on campaign financing and expenditure. These amendments were not submitted to the Venice Commission for legal review and were therefore not assessed by it.

15. The Kyrgyz Parliament is a 120-member unicameral parliament. Its members are elected for a five-year term through a closed-list proportional representation system in a single nationwide constituency with a double threshold (see paragraph 16). Independent candidates are not allowed to run for parliamentary elections. Registered voters who have reached the age of 21 on polling day may be elected to parliament unless they have a criminal record which has not been cancelled.

16. To win seats, a party must obtain at least 7% of the votes cast nationwide and at least 0.7% of the votes in each of the seven regions (*oblasts*), as well as in the cities of Bishkek and Osh. Under the Constitution, the representation of a political party in parliament is limited to 65 seats in order to avoid the dominance of a party. The Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR criticised the double threshold rule and the limit on the number of seats in their 2014 Opinion.⁴

2. Joint Opinion on the draft Law on presidential and parliamentary elections, the draft Law on elections to local governments and the draft Law on the formation of election commissions of the Kyrgyz Republic, adopted by the Council for Democratic Elections at its 37th meeting (Venice, 16 June 2011) and by the Venice Commission at its 87th plenary session (Venice, 17-18 June 2011; CDL-AD(2011)025; hereafter “the 2011 Opinion”).

3. Joint Opinion on the draft Election Law of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted by the Council for Democratic Elections at its 48th meeting (Venice, 12 June 2014) and by the Venice Commission at its 99th plenary session (Venice, 13-14 June 2014; CDL-REF(2014)014; hereafter “the 2014 Opinion”).

17. The government led by the Prime Minister is formed by the party holding more than 50% of the seats in parliament. However, if no party holds such a majority, the President selects a party to form the coalition majority and government. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, five parties obtained seats in parliament and three of them formed a coalition, the other two becoming opposition parties. Since 2010, the ruling coalition has been re-formed three times. The current ruling coalition consists of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), with 26 seats in parliament, Ar-Namys (25 seats) and Ata Meken (18 seats). Ata Jurt (28 seats) and Respublika (23 seats) form the opposition.

3. Electoral administration and registration of voters and candidates

18. The elections of 4 October 2015 were administered by a three-tier system of electoral commissions. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) is a permanent body elected by parliament for a five-year term of office. It has 12 members: the President, the parliamentary majority and the parliamentary opposition each appoint four members. The current CEC was formed in July 2011.

19. The parliamentary elections of 4 October 2015 were organised by 54 territorial election commissions (TECs) and 2 374 precinct election commissions (PECs), including 36 in 26 foreign countries. The TECs and PECs are formed for two-year terms from political parties and local authorities. The appointments made by local authorities are based on proposals from non-governmental organisations and groups of voters.

20. The ad hoc committee of the Parliamentary Assembly was informed that the meetings of the CEC were open to representatives of political parties, the media and observers. A less positive aspect was that the meeting agendas were not published in advance and that the CEC did not always inform the international observers about future meetings. Moreover, on 2 October 2015, the Chair of the CEC hurriedly left a meeting with the international observers without answering all the questions. Some decisions of the CEC were not published in full or were published belatedly. Most of the recommendations in the Venice Commission's 2011 Opinion concerning electoral administration were focused on improved transparency, training and the implementation in good faith of existing provisions. The problems observed stemmed above all from unsatisfactory implementation, not from the law itself.

21. All citizens aged 18 or over on polling day are entitled to participate in elections. In all, 2 761 297 voters were registered on the electoral rolls. However, the total number of citizens enjoying the constitutional right to vote remains uncertain. Different institutions give very different figures. It appears that a certain number of citizens were not registered during the biometric registration campaign. According to figures provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 612 747 Kyrgyz citizens of voting age live out of the country. Only 10% of them were able to register their biometric data in order to participate in the elections. 15 322 voters were registered to vote in Kyrgyz diplomatic missions.

22. For the first time, voter lists were drawn up on the basis of the Unified Population Register (UPR), for which the State Registration Department is responsible. This measure was mainly intended to eliminate errors in the population register and should make it easier to combat electoral fraud; citizens have to provide their biometric data to the State Registration Department in order to be registered to vote. Biometric data required, amongst other things, an imprint of the ten fingers of the hands.

23. Most people with whom the ad hoc committee spoke were in favour of the idea of biometric identification, but some were deeply concerned about the short time available for carrying out such a complex procedure. Others also expressed concern over the inadequacy of the guarantees regarding protection of their personal data. Only biometric passports and identity cards were accepted as voter ID on polling day. It would appear that some 28 000 voters still have the old identity cards (known as "1994 passports").

24. The ad hoc committee noted that the use of new technologies for biometric registration of voters and electronic scanning of ballot papers showed the desire of the Kyrgyz authorities to improve the electoral process and make it more transparent and was, generally speaking, a success.

25. However, the hasty introduction of biometric registration of voters led to considerable problems regarding inclusiveness of voter lists and raised legitimate concerns as to the safeguards put in place to protect personal data. According to figures provided by the OSCE/ODIHR observers, some 15% of all voters were not registered at the polling station where, according to their home addresses, they should have been registered.

4. 2014 Opinion, paragraphs 18-19.

26. The deadline for registration of party lists was set at 25 August 2015. Initially, 34 parties announced their intention of participating in the election, but many failed to provide the necessary documentation, including proof that they had paid the electoral deposit; consequently, they were not registered. Fourteen political parties were registered by the CEC for the parliamentary elections. All submitted their list of candidates and paid the required electoral deposit of KGS 5 million (about €72 800). This deposit is refunded only to parties which obtain at least 5% of the votes cast.

27. All registered party lists complied with the quotas established by the Electoral Law concerning gender, national minorities, youth and persons with disabilities. Registration of lists of candidates is conditional on compliance with the following quotas:

- lists must include at least 30% men and 30% women, and the under-represented sex must appear at least once in each group of four candidates on the list;
- at least 15% of candidates on each list must be from national minorities;
- at least 15% of candidates on each list must be under the age of 35, and at least two must be people with disabilities.

28. Article 3 of the Electoral Law withdraws the right to stand from any citizen who has been the subject of a conviction, regardless of the nature of the offence committed. This article was the main reason for the rejection of individual candidates for these elections. The Assembly regrets this restrictive approach of the electoral legislation. In their 2011 and 2014 opinions, the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR recommended that the law should be amended so that the right to stand can only be withdrawn where a person has been convicted of committing a crime of such a serious nature that the loss of political rights is proportionate to the crime committed, and only where a judge has made a specific determination that the circumstances of the individual case require forfeiture of rights.

4. Election campaign, campaign financing and media coverage

29. The election campaign began on 4 September and ended 24 hours before the start of voting. In the early stages of the campaign, the most prominent parties were Ata Meken, Bir Bol, Onuugu-Progress and the SDPK. Ar-Namys, Butun Kyrgyzstan-Emgek, Kyrgyzstan, Meken Yntymagy, Respublika-Ata Jurt and Uluu Kirghizistan were also active in some geographical regions.

30. The election campaign was calm and peaceful. According to the observers, the main parties mounted highly visible campaigns throughout the country and for the entire campaign period. The President of the Republic was highly visible during the campaign, and the SDPK used his popularity to its advantage. According to the international long-term observers, the misuse of State resources in favour of particular parties, which had been a concern in the past, was not raised as a major issue in these elections.

31. A number of people with whom the Assembly's ad hoc committee spoke mentioned cases of vote buying. Addressing a gathering of political parties in Bishkek on 15 September, Prime Minister Temir Sariyev called on political parties to stop trying to buy votes and collecting voters' passports. According to the OSCE/ODIHR observers, five residents of Jalal-Abad stated on 3 October that they had received money from a political party to vote for it.

32. The main political parties built their election campaigns around the themes of the fight to reduce unemployment and foster economic development, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and the fight against the dangers of mounting religious tensions and religious extremism.

33. The election campaign was financed from political parties' election funds. These funds may receive contributions from the party and the candidates and voluntary donations from individuals or legal entities. Candidates on party lists cannot set up their own election fund. Parties do not receive any public funding. The Electoral Law prohibits donations from State-owned or anonymous foreign sources and from religious or charitable organisations, and sets limits on the amount of contributions, donations and total campaign expenditure. According to the audit report of 14 September 2015, the Onuguu-Progress Party had spent the largest amount since its election fund was started (KGS 92.6 million, or around €1.2 million), followed by Respublika-Ata Jurt, Ata Meken and the SDPK.

34. The Electoral Law also limits the amount of contributions, donations and total campaign expenditure. In the 2014 Opinion, the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR emphasised the need for transparency and accountability in campaign finance and effective mechanisms for monitoring legal compliance through audits. According to many people with whom the ad hoc committee spoke, the real campaign expenditure of political parties and their candidates is far in excess of the official figures contained in the audit reports.

35. Articles 22 to 28 of the Electoral Law regulate the media during elections. Television is the main source of political information for the population. The majority of television stations with nationwide coverage are fully or partly State-owned and the Electoral Law requires these television stations to allocate at least one hour of free airtime per working day to parties competing in the upcoming elections. According to the OSCE/ODIHR media monitoring report, the public channels complied with this legislative requirement. However, the channels TV 5 and Piramida, which were nationalised in 2011 and received public funding in 2015, did not comply with the legislation and did not allocate one hour of free airtime to political parties.

36. Election campaign coverage is seen by the media as an opportunity to make money. It allows the media to sell airtime and space to contestants, provided that prices are equal for all contestants and are published within ten days after elections are announced. The CEC has established special accreditation for media outlets that offer paid political advertisements and can suspend the right to publish paid political advertisements if a media outlet fails to provide objective coverage of the campaign or the elections, or if it attempts to damage the honour or dignity of election commissioners.

37. Generally, the ad hoc committee found that media coverage was balanced. However, it draws attention to the Venice Commission's 2014 opinion on the need for improvement in the provisions regulating the media in elections, particularly as regards the following points: providing equitable coverage of contestants; respecting the right of the media to exercise independent editorial coverage of campaign events; and removing the requirement for special accreditation for media outlets to cover the electoral campaign.

5. Polling day

38. Polling day was calm and the voting well organised. The ad hoc committee took note of the smooth running of the election and of the presence of party representatives and observers at a large number of the polling stations visited. Generally, the voting process went smoothly. Polling station staff gave the observers their full co-operation.

39. The ad hoc committee identified a number of technical shortcomings in the polling stations visited:

- the system for scanning ballot papers worked well on the whole, with some problems noted; however, it gave rise to concerns over ballot secrecy because voters' choices were visible on the ballot papers when they were scanned and placed in the ballot box; according to ODIHR, voting secrecy was not guaranteed in 27% of the polling stations visited;
- the secrecy of the vote was not respected: the ballot papers had no envelopes and the booths no curtains; the voter was not anonymous as his face and contact details appeared on the screens of the polling station as soon as he received the ballot paper to indicate the party of his choice; the ballots were entered into the ballot box-scanner in full view of everyone;
- a considerable number of voters were registered at polling stations which did not correspond to their place of residence, or were not listed despite having completed the biometric registration procedure;
- in some polling stations, voter information was lacking;
- there were some problems with regard to identity cards;
- cases were noted of unintentional failure to comply with procedures for counting votes and preparing results protocols;
- many polling stations visited had an excessive number of registered voters (as many as 4 000), which, in practice, would have prevented many voters from voting in the event of a large turnout;
- in general, polling stations were inaccessible or accessible only with difficulty for people with disabilities.

40. According to the official results announced by the CEC on 15 October, six parties obtained seats in the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan: the SDPK – 38 seats; Respublika-Ata – 28 seats; the Kyrgyzstan Party – 18 seats; Onuugu-Progress – 13 seats; Bir-Bol – 12 seats; and Ata Meken – 11 seats.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

41. The ad hoc committee of the Parliamentary Assembly concluded that the parliamentary elections of 4 October 2015 in Kyrgyzstan were competitive and offered voters a wide choice; voters were able to choose freely from among a large number of candidates. Voting was also transparent. Polling day was calm and the voting quite well organised. The ad hoc committee noted with satisfaction the presence of a large number of party representatives and non-partisan domestic observers at the polling stations visited.

42. Regarding the legal framework, these elections were the first to be held under the 2011 Electoral Law as amended at the beginning of this year. The ad hoc committee regrets that a certain number of Venice Commission recommendations were not taken into consideration when the electoral legislation was amended. It considers that Kyrgyzstan needs to considerably improve its legal framework governing elections, and in particular the implementation thereof, in order to guarantee the constitutional right of all citizens to participate in elections in good conditions.

43. The ad hoc committee welcomes the fact that the election campaign was conducted in a calm and peaceful manner without any of the tensions and violence seen in previous elections. In this connection, it underlines the maturity and sense of responsibility shown by the main political players involved in the elections.

44. The Assembly's observer delegation heard from various sources about cases of irregularities during the election campaign, in particular the misuse of administrative resources by candidates and allegations of bribing of voters. The ad hoc committee calls on the competent Kyrgyz authorities and political leaders to exclude such practices from the electoral process in future because they undermine voter confidence in the elections and the democratic values they embody.

45. With regard to the financing of political parties and the election campaign, the ad hoc committee regrets that the Venice Commission's recommendations contained in the 2014 Opinion have still, to a large extent, not been acted upon. This applies in particular to the recommendations concerning the transparency and accountability of campaign finance and the availability of effective mechanisms for monitoring legal compliance through audits. According to many sources, the real campaign expenditure of political parties and their candidates was far in excess of the official figures contained in the audit reports.

46. The ad hoc committee considers that the Parliamentary Assembly should continue its close co-operation with the newly elected Kyrgyz Parliament via its partner for democracy status, and with the Venice Commission, in order to resolve the problems noted during the parliamentary elections of 4 October 2015. The ad hoc committee therefore calls on the Kyrgyz authorities to continue co-operating with the Parliamentary Assembly in order to implement the recommendations contained in [Resolution 1984 \(2014\)](#), as well as those of the Venice Commission contained in the 2011 and 2014 Opinions, in order to improve its legal framework and electoral practices.

47. The ad hoc committee considers that the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly should continue to help Kyrgyzstan, by means of their various co-operation programmes, to improve its legal framework governing elections and the implementation thereof.

Appendix 1 – Composition of the ad hoc committee

Based on proposals by the political groups of the Assembly, the ad hoc committee was composed as follows:

Meritxell MATEU PI (Andorra, ALDE), Chairperson

- **Socialist Group (SOC)**
 - Josette DURRIEU, France
 - Gisela WURM, Austria
- **Group of the European People’s Party (EEP/CD)**
 - Deborah BERGAMINI, Italy
 - Inese LĪBIŅA-EGNERE, Latvia
 - Stefaan VERCAMER, Belgium
 - Andres HERKEL, Estonia
 - Yves POZZO DI BORGIO, France
 - Attila TILKI, Hungary
- **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**
 - André BUGNON, Switzerland
 - Nellija KLEINBERGA, Latvia
 - Meritxell MATEU PI, Andorra
 - Chiora TAKTAKISHVILI, Georgia
- **European Conservatives Group (EC)**
 - Lord Richard BALFE, United Kingdom
 - Ingebjørg GODSKESEN, Norway
- **Venice Commission**
 - Nicolae ESANU (Republic of Moldova)
- **Secretariat**
 - Chemavon CHAHBAZIAN, Head of the Election observation and Interparliamentary co-operation Division, Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly
 - Danièle GASTL, Assistant, Election observation and Interparliamentary co-operation Division, Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly
 - Gaël MARTIN-MICALLEF, Administrator, Venice Commission

Appendix 2 – Programme of the election observation mission (2-5 October 2015)

Friday 2 October 2015

- 10:30-11:30 PACE ad hoc committee internal meeting:
- Opening by Ms Meritxell Mateu Pi, Head of the delegation
 - Information by the Venice Commission secretariat on the recent developments in the legal framework
 - Information by the secretariat of PACE on the deployment, logistic questions; distribution of files
- Joint briefings OSCE-PA, EP and PACE
- 13:00-13:20 Opening by Heads of delegation:
- Mr Ignacio Sánchez-Amor, Special Co-ordinator of the short-term OSCE observers
 - Mr Ryszard Czarnecki, Head of Delegation of the European Parliament
 - Ms Meritxell Mateu Pi, Head of Delegation of the PACE
 - Ms Ivana Dobesova, Head of Delegation of the OSCE-PA
- 13:30-14:00 Introduction:
- Mr John MacGregor, Head of the OSCE office in the Kyrgyz Republic
 - Ambassadeur Cesare de Montis, Head of the European Commission delegation in the Kyrgyz Republic
 - Mr Alexander Avanesov, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) representative in the Kyrgyz Republic
- 14:00-15:30 Information meeting with Ambassador Boris Frlec, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission and members of the core team
- 15:45-16:45 Meeting with Mr Tuigunaaly Abdraimov, Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission, and Mr Dastan Dogoev, Deputy to the Chairperson of the State Registration Service
- 16:45-18:45 Chairpersons or candidates of political parties represented in the parliament:
- Ms Baktygul Kubanyzbekova and Mr Omurbek Addrakhmanova, Ar-Namys Party
 - Ms Aijan Orozakunova, Respublika-Ata-Jurt Party

Saturday 3 October 2015

- 09:00-10:30 Chairpersons or candidates of political parties:
- Mr Doslay Esenaliev, Bir Bol “Be one” party for national unity and patriotism
 - Mr Tokon Mamytov, Butun “United” Kyrgyzstan – Emgek “Labor”
- 10:45-12:00 NGO Round table. Theme: overview of the political situation and key election-related issues of the 2015 election
- Valentyn Bogatyrev, Coordinator analytical consortium “Perspektiva”
 - Cholpon Omurkanova, NGO Eagl (gender and election monitoring)
 - Aynura Usupbekova, NGO Taza Shailoo (trains local long-term and short-term observers)
 - Tolekan Ismailova, NGO Bir Duino
 - Dinara Oshurakhunova, Head of Coalition for Democracy and Society
 - Bektur Osmonbaev, Legal clinic Adilet (contesting obligatory biometrics)
- 12:00-13:00 Media Roundtable:
- Illiam Karypbekov, Director general of State TV and Radio company (KTRK) and Adel Laisheva, Chair of the KTRK pre-election campaign debates
 - Bakyt Baketaev, political commentator and analyst
 - Kabay Karabekov, “*Kommercant*” newspaper
- 13:00-13:30 OSCE/ODIHR Briefing (security, co-ordination, forms)

13:30-14:30 Deployment information and meeting with drivers and interpreters

Sunday 4 October 2015

All day Opening of polling stations
 Observation of elections
 Closing of polling stations

Monday 5 October 2015

08:00- 08:45 PACE ad hoc committee debriefing meeting
09:30-11:00 Meeting of Heads of delegation
14:00 Joint press conference of the Heads of delegation

Appendix 3 – Press release issued by the international election observation mission (IEOM)

Elections in Kyrgyzstan were competitive and offered voters a wide range of choice, while highlighting need for improved procedures and transparency, international observers say

Bishkek, 5 October 2015 – The parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan were competitive and provided voters with a wide range of choice, while the manner in which they were administered highlighted the need for better procedures and increased transparency, the international observers concluded in a preliminary statement released today.

While the use of new voting technologies, signalling the political will to improve elections, was successful in many respects, the hurried introduction of biometric registration resulted in significant problems in the inclusiveness of the voter list. This, concerns over ballot secrecy and significant procedural problems during the vote count were the main issues that tarnished what was a generally smooth election day, the observers said. “These lively and competitive elections were unique in this region as, until 8 o’clock last night, nobody knew what the composition of the parliament would be,” said Ignacio Sánchez Amor, Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “Impressive efforts were made to implement biometric registration and new voting technologies, but procedural shortcomings point to the need for further work.”

Yesterday’s parliamentary elections were keenly contested, with the main parties in particular mounting highly visible campaigns throughout the country and for the entire campaign period, the observers said. The President was highly visible during the campaign, and one political party used his prestige to its benefit. The misuse of State resources in the favour of particular parties, a concern in the past, was not raised as a major issue in these elections, the statement says. “Yesterday, voting was transparent, and voters made their choice freely among a large number of contestants,” said Meritxell Mateu Pi, Head of the PACE Delegation. “Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan needs to improve its electoral legal framework and more particularly its implementation to guaranty constitutional rights of all citizens to participate in elections. Moreover, transparency of electoral campaigns and political parties’ funding should be reinforced.”

The voter list was based on a unified, nationwide population register, and these elections were the first in which biometric data were used for voter identification, with the stated aim of limiting electoral malfeasance and increasing voter trust. Despite efforts to ensure that all citizens were included in the population register, some did not submit biometric data, including due to concerns over data protection. While there was a public information campaign to familiarize voters with the new voter registration system, the information provided was insufficient, the observers said.

Central Election Commission (CEC) sessions were open to party representatives, the media, and citizen and international observers, but the holding of informal “working meetings”, as a lack of complete, up-to-date information on its website reduced the transparency of its work, the statement says. The CEC’s decisions and resolutions were not always firmly based in law, and directly contradicted the law at times. There was a general level of trust in the work and impartiality of commissions at the regional and precinct levels. “The embrace of live debates, enabling voters to clearly compare their candidates was a welcome addition to what became a vibrant campaign,” said Ivana Dobešová, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. “The expectation that politicians should be held accountable in front of television audiences is, for this region, a rare but healthy practice.”

The media provided contestants with the opportunity to present their views through debates and political advertisements, but coverage in news and current affairs programmes consisted largely of paid-for reports. The limited news coverage of the campaign in most outlets, as well as a lack of analytical reporting, reduced the amount of impartial information available to voters, the statement says. The lack of editorial coverage of contestants’ campaigns and platforms was in contrast to extensive positive coverage of the President and other State officials in all State-financed media. “The EU and the European Parliament will continue to support Kyrgyzstan, and stand ready to offer strong support to the country in the improvement of its electoral system,” said Ryszard Czarnecki, Head of the EP delegation. “This will be part of our economic assistance for further democratic development.”

Candidate registration was inclusive, as the CEC registered the lists of all 14 political parties that submitted the required documents and paid the electoral deposit. Quotas to ensure representation on party lists for women, minorities, youth and those with disabilities were respected at the time of registration, but the effectiveness of the quotas is undermined by the lack of provisions to maintain them after registration, the observers said.

These elections were the first held under the 2011 election law, amended earlier this year, and while the electoral framework generally provides an adequate basis for holding democratic elections, inconsistencies remain, and greater clarity could provide better guidance and ensure uniform application of the law, the statement says. The election law regulates campaign financing and sets contribution and expenditure limits, but greater transparency, including through regular publication of detailed reports that parties must submit to the CEC prior to and after election day, would be of benefit. “The election administration took extensive steps to try to streamline the voting process. Nevertheless, better procedures and increased transparency are essential for progress to take root,” said Ambassador Boris Frlec, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term election observation mission. “This will also depend on the harmonization of electoral legislation, including fundamental points such as the right for independent candidates to stand and the removal of the dual threshold. ODIHR stands ready to assist the Kyrgyz authorities in this regard.”

Civil society was actively involved in observing the elections. However, the CEC only began accrediting foreign observers 30 days before election day, thus limiting their ability to observe all stages of the electoral process, the observers said.

Election day was peaceful and, while the voting process was assessed positively in 95% of the polling stations observed, in a significant number of stations not all voters could be found on voter lists. The biometric identification equipment and ballot scanners generally worked well, although occasional technical problems led to regular temporary interruptions of the process, the statement says. The vote count was assessed negatively in more than one third of polling stations observed, which is a concern, and the tabulation process was also assessed negatively at many of the territorial election commissions observed.