

## **Election observations by OSCE ODIHR**

Since the commencement of its election observation activities in 1993, the ODIHR has observed well over 100 elections in the OSCE regions, deploying in the process a total of more than 10,000 international observers from OSCE participating States. In some of the countries we worked closely with ACEEEO.

Needless to say that OSCE/ODIHR is paying much attention to media monitoring as one of the critical components of our election observation methodology. Monitoring the media during election periods has become an increasingly common practice, using a combination of statistical analysis and the techniques of media studies and discourse analysis to measure where coverage has been fair. There is even a special section in the OSCE/ODIHR observation reports focusing on media environment and monitoring during election periods.

While observing elections, OSCE/ODIHR policy in media monitoring could be formulated in the following way:

- Provide an independent and credible assessment of the freedom of the media during election campaign;
- Provide an independent and credible assessment of the fairness of media access and coverage during an election campaign;
- Raise public awareness of harassment and intimidation of the media;
- Encourage journalists, editors, and owners to observe the standards of balanced reporting and avoid hate speech and other items that incite violence and hatred; and
- Advocate positive changes to the media laws and regulations so that they meet international standards.

The ODIHR methodology used in media monitoring involves assessing the quantitative and qualitative coverage provided in news programs/reports to chosen subjects and themes to see whether it correlates with the basic rules of balanced and fair journalism.

Quantitative analysis of the print media in the OSCE States involves measuring space given to the chosen subjects and themes. Quantitative monitoring of the broadcast media involves measuring the total amount of time a certain subject appears on camera or is heard on the radio.

When measuring and recording the amount of time dedicated to particular subjects, the ODIHR monitors try to measure additional factors that can highlight more subtle problems with the way different subjects are portrayed. For example, some party's candidates or representatives may always appear on the air and speak in their own voices, while others may be quoted or their statements paraphrased or summarized by announcer.

Qualitative analysis involves assessing the tone of coverage, specifically whether a subject or issue is portrayed positively, negatively, or neutrally. It also involves an assessment of the accuracy of coverage and any attempts to manipulate.

In addition to news programs, the ODIHR includes in media monitoring candidate debates, talk shows, and current-affairs programs. Analysis of candidate debates aims to assess whether each candidate was treated fairly under the agreed rules and whether those "rules of debates" were themselves reasonable. As the purpose of talk shows and current-affairs programs is to provide viewers and listeners with insight and knowledge of current issues, they do not necessarily provide a balanced view within a single program, but they should do so over a series. In programs of this nature the ODIHR focuses on the use of inflammatory language and hate speech.

Where it is possible the ODIHR is trying to monitor paid political advertising. Analysis could reveal the content of the advertisements, who the main targets of attack are, whether inflammatory language or hate speech is used, and what the key messages of various candidates or parties are. It could also provide reliable information about the quantity of advertising purchased, from which estimates can be made of the amount spent.

Though the situation with media environment in the Central and Eastern Europe has changed for the better, there are still a few concerns to be addressed. In general, this is the control of the ruling party or the executive administration over state media and more wide and favourable coverage of the government candidates or the parties. In addition, in some cases information provided lacks sufficient variety, quality and independence to allow voters to make a well-informed choice.

Through the Copenhagen Document, OSCE participating State committed themselves to respect and provide effective opportunities for the exercise of the rights and freedoms, including non-discriminatory access to media. While observing elections ODIHR does not only identify

the problems but also stand ready to provide recommendations to improve media environment. In its turn, elections commissions are trying to do their best to administer elections in the most efficient way recognizing the importance of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all groups participating in the electoral process as well as the role of the media in voter information.

Vadim Zhdanovich,  
Election Adviser of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and  
Human Rights