



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Ukrainian Presidential Election Campaign

As delivered by Political Counselor Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 30, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The presidential election in Ukraine on October 31, and its possible second round in November, will be critically important benchmarks in Ukraine's democratic evolution.

The United States notes that the ODIHR Interim Report on the Ukrainian election, issued on September 22, states that the existing election code provides "an adequate framework for the conduct of democratic elections, *if implemented correctly and impartially.*"

However, there are already numerous and a still growing number of reports from Ukraine about grossly biased media coverage on state-run media in favor of Prime Minister Yanukovich, attempts to stifle independent media, the abuse of administrative resources on behalf of Yanukovich's campaign, and interference with opposition campaigns.

In light of these reports, it is increasingly important that steps be taken to ensure that the electoral process, in terms of public access to the full range of candidate positions and views, be sufficiently impartial to allow for a genuinely democratic election that meets OSCE standards.

In addition, independent broadcast outlets, such as the Channel 5 TV station, continue to face major obstacles to providing alternative sources of news. Radio Liberty remains off large and important segments of the FM band in Ukraine, despite months of promises from Ukrainian officials that access would be restored.

The concerns raised by the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission about the greatly uneven playing field during the 2002 parliamentary election appear to be going unheeded in the run up to the upcoming presidential election.

This once again points to the importance of improving the OSCE's ability to promote implementation of post-election ODIHR recommendations.

The United States recalls that Ukraine and all OSCE participating States committed in the 1990 Copenhagen Document to "provide that no legal or administrative obstacle stands in the way of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings and individuals wishing to participate in the electoral process."

We call on the Government of Ukraine to live up to the spirit and letter of this commitment immediately.

Given the closeness of the presidential contest in Ukraine, transparency and fairness in the pre-election stage are critical to achieving a credible outcome. On voting day itself, of course, unfettered secret balloting and accurate vote tabulation are essential.

The United States would also like to take this opportunity to thank the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission for its September 22 Interim Report.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.