

UZBEKISTAN:
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
DECEMBER 2007

Report
by
Ragnhild Hollekim

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Series editor: Siri Skåre

Series consultants: Hege Mørk, Lisa Kirkengen, Christian Boe Astrup

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Preface

On 26 September 2007, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) received an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Uzbekistan to observe the presidential election, scheduled to take place on 23 December 2007. A Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) was undertaken between 28 and 30 November 2007. Late issuance of visas made it impossible to consider the deployment of a full scale election observation mission. Uzbek authorities, on their hand, limited the number of invited OSCE observers to 25.

The NAM report states that because of suppression of most Uzbek opposition forces and independent society, and a lack of critical media, the political process in the Republic of Uzbekistan does not seem conducive to meaningful and effective competition. Further, recommendations following the OSCE/ODHIR Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM)¹ for the 2004 parliamentary elections appear so far not to have been considered.

All these aspects taken into account, OSCE recommended a LEOM only for the 2007 presidential election. It was not considered necessary to deploy short term observers (STO). Following these decisions, no systematic and comprehensive observation of election day (e-day) proceedings was to be conducted. The main purpose of the mission would be to assess the legal and administrative framework, monitor aspects of the election campaign and maintain a dialogue with authorities and the civil society.² Recommendations for improving the electoral framework in line with the OSCE Copenhagen Commitments would be offered.

On 10 December 2007, a LEOM was opened in Tashkent, counting 21 observers. 12 observers, in teams of two, were immediately deployed to the provinces, each team covering two or three regions. In addition, a core staff of nine was stationed in Tashkent. The LEOM for the 2007 presidential election of Uzbekistan was headed by Austrian Ambassador Walter Siegl.³

One Norwegian observer, Ragnhild Hollekim, was recruited to the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM by NORDEM. Ms Hollekim was deployed to Bukhara and Navoiy regions, located in the central part of Uzbekistan.

This report will mainly reflect the findings of the Norwegian observer. These observations do, however, largely correspond to those of the OSCE/ODHIR LEOM, as presented in the Press Statement issued in Tashkent 24 December 2007.

The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights / NORDEM
University of Oslo
January 2008

¹ ODIHR: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

² OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report 4 December 2007

³ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Press release. 24 December 2007

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Map of Country

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Introduction

Since ancient times, the geopolitical location of Uzbekistan has been where the main caravan roads traversed to link Asia and Europe, predicating the historical richness of the land.⁴ Uzbekistan was created as an entity in 1924, by Soviet planners. The Republic of Uzbekistan, a former republic of Soviet Union (USSR), declared independence 31 August 1991, a few months before the final break-up of USSR. The Incumbent President Islam Karimov is a former First Secretary of Communist Party of Uzbekistan (since 1989). He was elected president for the first time in 1991, and later reelected in 2000, against nominal opposition and with an overwhelming majority of votes. Widespread hopes that independence would lead to greater political pluralism turned out to be short-lived. President Karimov rapidly centralized power during the early 1990s, and has since eliminated most political opponents. The population has been denied basic civil liberties and the President has been increasingly relying on security services.⁵

The OSCE/ODIHR LEOM to Uzbekistan for the 2007 presidential election noted in their Press Statement in Tashkent 24 December:

“Strictly controlled Uzbek elections did not offer a genuine choice, ODIHR observers conclude”

According to the Press Statement, a strictly controlled political environment left no room for real opposition. The election in general failed to meet many OSCE Commitments for democratic elections.

On the positive side, Ambassador Walter Siegl, Head of LEOM for the 2007 presidential election in Uzbekistan said:

“In the context of democratic development, it is notable that this time there were more candidates than in earlier presidential elections, including a female candidate and a non-partisan candidate nominated by an initiative group. But since all the candidates in the present election publicly endorsed the Incumbent, the electorate was deprived of a genuine choice”.

In addition, extensive training materials were produced for election officials (and for voter education purposes), and election administration bodies at different levels showed commitment to their tasks.

Many concerns were raised in the Press Statement. The fact that the Incumbent has been president in Uzbekistan since 1991 and constitutional restrictions allowing only two consecutive terms, running again for the 2007 presidential election raises some legal issues.

There were excessively high requirements for being able to register as a candidate. An absence of any real competition of ideas and political views were observed. The election campaign was hardly visible, and the coverage in the media limited and strictly controlled. Still, the media clearly favored the President, state TV allotting nearly 80% of

⁴ LEOM Uzbekistan. Observer manual

⁵ ICG Conflict history: Uzbekistan. Jan. 2006

their news coverage to him. Freedom of assembly was not ensured. Further violations of other basic civil and political rights are a constant concern raised by many interlocutors. Questions are raised regarding the high turn out of voters on e-day, in light of the small number of voters observed by the mission. Multiple signatures on the voter lists indicate a pattern of proxy voting. Procedural problems and irregularities were also observed during count and tabulation, such as adjustment of figures which could not be properly accounted for.⁶

Political background

Uzbekistan became fully independent 21 December, 1991. The population counts approximately 25 155 064. 76% of the population is Uzbek, 6 are % Russian, 5% are Tadjik and 4 % are Kazakh. There is also presence of Tatar and Kyrgyz. Official languages are Uzbek and Russian, Russian is widely spoken. Nearly 90 % are Muslim, 9% are Russian Orthodox. While agriculture still is very important, Uzbekistan has a large mineral and mining industry. In addition, the oil and gas industry are of growing importance.

Since June 1989, Uzbekistan has been governed by Islam Karimov. He was then appointed First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. In March 1990 he was elected President of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. In December 1991 he was, in accordance with a new Law on Presidential Election (PEL), elected the first President of the newly independent Republic of Uzbekistan. He has held this position since, with no breakup between terms.⁷

Uzbekistan has long been suffering from a closed and tightly controlled economy, a high level of corruption and regime stalwart. The situation has driven away investors, reduced people's living standard and in general exacerbated poverty. There has been a sharp rise in food prices, also creating instances of public protest. The government has committed itself to political and economic reform, but little progress has been made, even though privatization is proceeding and already implemented in some main sectors of the economy. Despite the recent price turmoil, there are at present signs of incomes rising somewhat, while inflation is leveling out or even falling.⁸

There is a continued disregard for civil liberties and little improvement in the human right situation. Uzbekistan has a poor human rights record, by Freedom House rated as one of the eight worst nations in 2005. Regime critiques are still victims of punitive measures and heavily prosecuted. These are human rights activists, independent journalists, religious groups (often unregistered) and foreign NGOs. It is in general difficult to access necessary information to assess the accuracy and objectivity

⁶ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Press release. 24 December 2007

⁷ See: Legal framework.

⁸ Swiss Peace. Fast Update. Uzbekistan. No 5, September to October 2007

concerning claims of serious human rights violations in Uzbekistan.⁹ There are several reasons for this. Information flow is in general severely controlled and restricted. There is a lack of independent, verifiable information. Victims are also often reluctant to pursue such cases for fear of possible reprisals.

Islamic fundamentalism is a major concern. Escalating repression is often justified by “the war on terror”. After 9/11, Uzbekistan became a strategic allied of the United States, allowing US air bases in the south of the country, on the border to Afghanistan. The relations with the US and the European Union deteriorated after the Uzbek government’s violent suppression of the Andijon Uprising in 2005.¹⁰ Serious human rights abuses against civilians during and in the aftermath of the Uprising, and the refusal to allow an independent investigation, were heavily criticized by both the US and the EU. The EU imposed targeted sanctions. The Uzbek government terminated the agreement allowing the US’s use of Karshi-Khanabad military base.¹¹

While Uzbekistan has been in a diplomatic stalemate with the US and the EU, the government has sought closer political contact with Russia and China. There are also signs of a softened stance towards Uzbekistan from the wider international society. When Uzbekistan celebrated the 16th anniversary of Uzbekistan’s independence 1 September 2007, President Karimov received the following (unexpectedly warm) message from President Bush: *“For the past 16 years our countries have jointly worked to overcome old and new challenges. We are currently striving for a partnership that would improve our cooperation in a number of fields, including fighting terrorism, democratic and market reforms as well as regional economic integration”*.¹² The EU has also softened sanctions somewhat since they were imposed after the 2005 Andijon Uprising.

The Andijon Uprising¹³

On 12 May 2005, an armed crowd broke into Andijon prison, setting 500 prisoners free. While this obviously in itself was a crime, the response from the government forces was excessively brutal. It is claimed that government forces fired indiscriminately into crowds of unarmed, peaceful civilians, who had gathered after the prison break. Possible number of victims may have been between 400 and 750. Government forces claim casualties were much fewer, as low as 173. Many civilians fled across the border to Kyrgistan. The Andijon event was the climax of a 6 months period of demonstrations across the country. People had become increasingly angered by especially ruinous economic policies (f. ex. decrees that levied high tariffs on imports, restricting the activities of bazaar traders, shortages of gas and electricity and a general worsening

⁹ Swiss Peace. Fast Update. Uzbekistan. No 5, September to October 2007

¹⁰ See: The Andijon Uprising

¹¹ ICG Conflict history: Uzbekistan. January 2006 and ICG Update Briefing. Asia Briefing No 67 Bishkek/Brussels, 22 August 2007

¹² Swiss Peace. Fast Update. Uzbekistan, Nr. 5, September to October 2007

¹³ The information about the Andijon Uprising is mainly found in ICG, Asia Briefing No. 38, 25 May 2005 and Human Right Watch: “Bullets Were Falling Like Rain” The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005, June 2005 Vol. 17, No 5(D)

corruption and bureaucracy). The President on his side claimed he had to act to end a revolt by Islamist extremists. The uprising started when 23 local businessmen were accused of involvement in Islamic extremism and acts against the state. While the government has linked these protests to the Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir organization¹⁴, no evidence of this has been brought forward. Relatives of the 23 businessmen claim the trial was motivated by their economic success, and growing power and popularity due to involvement in charity for the less fortunate. There are claims that authorities continued to intimidate and arrest witnesses to the killings in the aftermath of the event, neither guaranteeing theirs nor their relatives' safety. Most questions concerning the exact death toll and the units responsible for the killings remain unanswered as of today.

Political parties and movements

There are five registered political parties in Uzbekistan. They all have seats in the current Legislative Chamber, elected in December 2004 and January 2005. Further, they all fully support the Incumbent President. While they officially address different part of the population, they do not provide a political significantly difference for the voter.

Uzbekistan Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Founded: 2003. Number of seats in the Legislative Chamber: 41. Members of LDP are mainly businessmen from the private sector, by President Karimov called “*the party of entrepreneurs, of business and of economic reform*”. The party has in addition members from both health care and cultural sectors. They see themselves as a centre – right party, focusing on and supporting private ownership. For the 2007 presidential election, the President was nominated by LDP for a new period in office.

Social Democratic Party (“Adolat”). Founded: 1995. Number of seats in the Legislative Chamber: 10. Adolat is fielding the only female candidate. Half of Adolat's members are female, mainly employees in education and health care sectors. In their party program they support rule of law, democratic values, and development of culture and science. Other aims are to protect socially vulnerable sections of the population.

Uzbekistan People's Democratic Party (PDP). Founded: 1991. Number of seats in the Legislative Chamber: 28. PDP is the heir to Communist Party of Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. Traditionally it is the biggest party in the country, but becoming of less importance, since President Karimov during the past years seemingly have been “grooming” newer parties with younger membership rolls. The party sees itself as an opposition party, but does not express critical views towards the work or the policy of the government and or the Incumbent. The party advocates stronger social policies than other registered parties.¹⁵

Self-Sacrifice National Democratic Party (“Fidokorlar”). Founded: 1998. Number of seats in the Legislative Chamber: 18. For the 2000 presidential election, while all parties forwarded President Karimov as their choice, it was Fidokorlar's nomination that was accepted by the also then Incumbent. Principal objectives are a democratic development

¹⁴ An international Islamic movement, advocates a peaceful overthrow of the government. Membership is prohibited. People believed to be members are persecuted by Uzbek authorities.

¹⁵ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report 4 December 2007

based on liberal market economy, supporting national interests, increase standard of living for the population in general and facilitate a basis for a fair civil society.

Uzbekistan National Rebirth Democratic Party (“*Tiklanish*”). Founded: 1995. Number of seats in the Legislative Chamber: 11. The primary objectives of the party are to promote the process of development of national self – consciousness and revival of Uzbek culture, educate the population in spirit of patriotism, building a lawful, democratic state and civil society and secure political pluralism.¹⁶

Two oppositional organizations (opposition parties are forbidden in Uzbekistan) need to be mentioned, Unity Movement (*Birlik*) and Liberty (*Erk*). Both leaders of the organizations fled the country 15 years ago. As President Karimov strengthened his political grip after coming to power in 1991, *Birlik* and other oppositional organizations were banned. For the 2004 parliamentary election, *Birlik* tried five times to register as a political party, claiming they fulfilled all necessary demands. The Ministry of Justice turned down their application every time and for different reasons.¹⁷ After Andijon, being a political activist in an oppositional organization became even more dangerous. This led to a decline in open support for *Birlik*. *Birlik* allegedly failed an attempt to set up an initiative group for the 2007 presidential election.

Erk was in fact registered as a party in 1991 and their leader, Muhammad Salih, ran for president, officially receiving 12.5% of the votes against Islam Karimov’s 88.5 %. *Erk* was later banned (in 1993). Salih was by the government held responsible for the bombings of Tashkent in 1999, and sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment in absentia. *Erk* allegedly decided to boycott the 2007 presidential election due to distrust in the electoral process. They seemingly at one point wanted to nominate Mohammad Salih. This was either way not possible, both due to the fact that it is impossible for him to return to Uzbekistan because of the prison sentence and because of provisions in Constitution¹⁸

Other movements are *Free Peasants (Ozod Dehqonlar)*, *Party of Agrarians and Entrepreneurs* and *Sunshine coalition*. In the run up to the 2004 parliamentary election, two of these movements, in addition to *Birlik* and *Erk* already mentioned, tried to register as political parties, without success.

It is at present difficult to access information about the current state and the popular support for all these movements.

¹⁶ Political Parties of Uzbekistan. Tashkent. Regional Policy Foundation. 2007

¹⁷ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report 4 December 2007

¹⁸ The Constitution (art. 90) says to be able to run for President, there is a residence requirement. This implies you need to have spent the last 10 years in the country.

The Legislative Framework

Uzbekistan is a presidential republic. The President is both head of state and head of the executive Branch. The Parliament (Oliy Majlis) consist of the Senate (100 seats, 84 seats elected by provincial councils and 16 seats appointed by the President) and the Legislative Chamber (120 seats, elected by direct vote). The Prime Minister and ministers are appointed by the President, with the consent of Parliament. The Judiciary comprises the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, High Economic Court and province, district and city courts.

*“Political power is concentrated in the office of the President, who signs all laws, introduces most of them and makes all significant appointments (and therefore dismissals), including regional governors, the judiciary and the Central Election Commission”.*¹⁹

The main legal provisions governing presidential elections are found in the *Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan* (1992, amended in 2002 and 2003), *Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Elections of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan* (PEL) (1992, with amendments in 1998 and 2004) and *Law on Political Parties* (1996). In addition, there are several other laws of relevance to this election, like *Safeguards of Electoral Rights for Citizens* (1994) and *Law on Central Election Commissions* (1998). Finally, a number of other laws may have provisions of relevance for elections, like the *Criminal Code*.

The Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and Uzbekistan is a signature to the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Following the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM for the 2004 Election for Oliy Majlis, a number of recommendations were given, “*in need of prompt attention*”,²⁰ to secure that legislation for elections in Uzbekistan are in line the Copenhagen Commitments. Examples were measures to secure the rights of citizens to seek political or public office and the rights of individuals and groups to establish political parties. Further, laws and public policy should work to permit political campaigning. While the Central Election Commission (CEC) claimed some changes had been introduced following these recommendations, the NAM for the 2007 presidential election was not able to have the nature of this fully specified. The Press Statement following the 2007 presidential election states that PEL is not in line with the Copenhagen Document. PEL bans registration of candidates of certain categories of citizens (f. ex. professional servicemen of religious organizations) and does not allow domestic civil society groups, not fielding a candidate, to observe elections in Uzbekistan. The legislative framework does not secure freedom of assembly, and concerns are raised regarding possible further violations of civil and political rights for citizens of Uzbekistan.²¹ Some noteworthy positive amendments were adopted to the PEL on 3 December 2004. To be mentioned is the possibility to nominate candidates from an initiative group, institutionalization of international election observation and

¹⁹ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Parliamentary Elections, 26 December 2004. Republic of Uzbekistan

²⁰ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Parliamentary Elections, 26 December 2004. Republic of Uzbekistan

²¹ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Press release. 24 December 2007

switching from negative to positive voting. On the negative side, this was when the possibility for domestic non-partisan observation of elections was abolished.²²

The Incumbent's decision to run as presidential candidate for the 2007 presidential election raises legal issues. The Constitution only allows two consecutive terms. Islam Karimov has been president since 1991. In 1995, in a referendum, his term was extended to 2000. Karimov was reelected in 2000. In 2002, in a referendum, the term was extended from five to seven years, implying that on the 22 January 2007, seven years had elapsed since the President had been inaugurated. While the Constitution clearly establishes the duration of a presidential term, it also states that elections are to be held on the last Sunday of December of the year. The President's official or legal status between 22 January 2007 and 23 December 2007, though unclear, has officially not been debated in Uzbekistan. On the other hand, PEL stipulates that the President shall fulfill his/her duties until a new elected president has assumed office (art. 39).

CEC expressed no legal concerns regarding President Karimov running again as a candidate for presidency, after 16 years in office. The decision was according to them (and almost all other interlocutors interviewed by LTOs) legitimized by the fact that he at present had only served one seven years term under the new Constitution. In fact, he has only now, for the first time, been elected for a full seven year term (in 2000 he was elected for a term of five years – a term that was later extended to seven years through a referendum in 2002). The way LTOs see it, this way of reasoning may in principle open for a possibility for President Karimov to run again in 2014.

Law on political parties regulates the registration of political parties in Uzbekistan. There is a registration requirement of 5000 signatures citizens, signalling their intention to become a member of the party. A political party needs to register with the Ministry of Justice. The Law on political parties prohibits formation of parties based on religion or ethnicity. Political parties which aim at altering the constitutional system, undermining state sovereignty or inciting social, national, racial and religious enmity are not allowed to register (art.3).²³ These provisions, or rather selective application of the provisions, have in an efficient manner prevented opposition parties to register with the Ministry of Interior. The result has been a lack of genuine competition and pluralism in Uzbek elections.

To be an eligible voter, you need to be an Uzbek citizen and 18 years old (PEL art. 2).

A voter can be included in the voter list until 20.00 on e-day, assuming he or she can provide documents proving identity and place of residence. (PEL art.23).

While somewhat vaguely regulated, PEL has provisions for out of country voting, early voting, mobile or homebound voting and voting in military camps and in hospitals.

²² OSCE/ODHIR LEOM. Presidential election 2007. Interim Report (5-15 December 2007)

²³ The Republic of Uzbekistan. Parliamentary elections - 2004. NORDEM report 05/2005

The Electoral Administration

Uzbekistan is divided into 12 regions (*viloyaltar*), the Independent City of Tashkent and Karakalpakstan Republic. Regions are further divided in districts or cities, led by councils of people's deputies (*kengash*) and administrative authorities (*khokimiyats/khokims*). Locally, there are villages, *kishlaks*, *auls* and *mahallas* with citizen's assemblies headed by *aksakals* (elected). Karakalpakstan has its own legislative, executive and jurisdiction bodies.

The President is elected for a seven year term of office (PEL art. 1). A run-off is needed if no candidate receives at least 50% of votes in the first round. During a second round, the candidate receiving more votes is elected. There is a 33% turnout threshold for an election to be considered valid (PEL art. 35).

The election administration consists of three levels: The Central Election Commission (CEC), 14 District Election Commissions (DECs) and 8266 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), out of which 43 serve out-of-country voting.

CEC is a permanent body, at present consisting of 22 members, included four women. More than 15 members shall be appointed by the Oliy Majlis on the proposals of the provincial councils. Chair of CEC is proposed by the President and elected among the CEC members. CEC establishes election districts, appoints members of DECs, registers candidates, draws up regulations and guidelines for the work of DECs and PECs, the election campaign, observers as well as for financial regulations (PEL art.14).

DEC has 11 -13 members, proposed by Province *Kengash* and appointed by CEC. DEC shall control and ensure implementation of the law in respective districts, establish precincts, secure equal conditions and participation for candidates, have an ongoing dialogue with representatives of political parties and initiative groups on election related matters, oversee compilation of voter lists, allocate budget to PECs, secure that PECs have the necessary resources for the election exercise, compile district election results and consider complaints and appeals (PEL art. 15,16 and 18-1).

Members of PECs are appointed by DEC, on propositions from District/City *Kengash*. PEC can consist of 5-19 members. PECs compile, make public and update voter lists, organize early voting, educate voters, arrange premises for voting, organize voting and count and make decisions on complaints and appeals. (PEL art. 16, 17 and 18-1).

CEC had drawn a fairly elaborate work plan for the 2007 presidential election, in addition to an instruction on the organization of the work of PECs in the preparation and holding of the 2007 presidential election.

According to CEC web site, there were 264 international observers accredited for the 2007 presidential election. The far bigger group was the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with 79 observers.

LTOs were very well received by DECs and PECs in Bukhara and Navoiy regions. DECs in both LTOs area of responsibility (AoR) had male members only. We were always welcomed, assisted in our work and provided with information. Preparation for elections went on schedule and interlocutors (with some exceptions) expressed satisfaction with and trust in the work of DECs. Logistically, no serious problems were reported.

Party observers were trained by the respective parties and accredited by DEC. In Bukhara, only LDP fielded party observers to all PSs (437). PDP, Adolat and IG fielded 369, 305 and 62 respectively. All applications from the parties/IG were accepted by DEC. In Navoiy, the parties/IG had applied for 324 party observers each, with the intention to cover all PSs. Here the parties/IG had a problem obtaining photos, a requirement to be accredited as a party observer. The result was that also in Navoiy region, only LDP was able to cover all PSs. PDP, Adolat and IG ended up having 152, 243 and 201 accredited party observers.

Chair of DEC Bukhara assured LTOs that the issue of family and proxy voting had been properly addressed at trainings. It is LTOs clear impression that chairs of PECs knew that PEL did not have provisions allowing proxy voting. As LTOs see it, the purpose of allowing proxy voting must have been to secure high turn – out figures.

LTOs observed uncertainty regarding procedures for early and home bound voting, and contradicting information was given. This can easily be explained by the fact that the provisions for this part of the election exercise are not explained in detail in PEL

While Chair of DEC Bukhara said he would make an effort, he was not able to acquire permission from the Ministry of Interior for LTOs to observe polling in military compounds.

The composition of PECs raise some concerns. LTOs found that chair or deputy chair of PECs, more as a rule than as an exception, were head or deputy head master of the school/director of the institution where the PSs was located. Most PEC members (sometimes all) were employees of the same school/institution. Political parties were excluded from becoming members of election commissions when amendments to PEL were adopted 3 December 2004.

Voter and Civic Education

Characteristic for the 2007 presidential election was the complete lack of an open, competitive and pluralistic political debate, helping the electorate to make informed choices. Voters were educated by PECs doing house calls²⁴, through information on posters issued by CEC (mainly located on election administration premises) and quite extensively through newspapers, TV and radio. This information was mainly on the election exercise itself, in addition to neutral information on candidates' profiles and political programs. Each province had received from CEC a certain (and equal) number of street posters for each candidate. No other street posters than these figuring any candidate, were observed by LTOs. Some voter education was also conducted on the strictly regulated and in advance by CEC approved and scheduled meetings between candidate proxies and voters in the provinces. Finally, all the parties (and the IG group)

²⁴ See: Voter Registration

said they did small scale campaigning through party cells/party members (for the IG: support groups) in the *mahallas*, also informing the voters of the exercise itself.

While first time voters were registered on the master list, they were also carefully registered on separate lists. The aim was to ensure that these voters received proper training for the election exercise. PECs invited first time voters for special training sessions at PEC. LTOs learnt that first time voters also received special training at different educational institutions. While in principle commendable, LTOs did receive information that young people at times felt this extra attention somewhat insistent.

Voter Registration

Number of registered voters for the 2007 presidential election was 16. 297. 400.

According to PEL, each PEC is in charge of compiling voter lists, disclose them to voters, review and accept applications about inaccuracies and introduce appropriate changes (art. 18). To be included in a voter list, you need to be 18 years of age and reside in the territory of the electoral precinct (art. 2). There was no central voter register, the compilation was carefully and diligently done through house visits, often in combination with lists and assistance from the local *Khokhimiats*. Every household received two, sometimes three visits from PEC members in the run up to election. On their last visit, every voter received a personal, numbered invitation card from PEC. By proving residence, a voter could be added to the list, also on e-day. The voter lists were mainly computerized but sometimes hand written. Sorting criteria varied, and at least three systems were observed: alphabetical order, by address or by numbers on election invitation cards.²⁵

It was LTOs impression that the voter registers were comprehensive, with a low threshold for appropriate changes.

Candidate registration

To run as a candidate for the presidential election, you need to be 35 years of age, had residence in the country the last 10 years and have a full command of the state language (The Constitution, art. 90). Candidates can be nominated by registered political parties or an initiative group of voters (PEL art. 24). To be able to register as a candidate for the presidential election, a nominee has to submit signatures constituting five % of total voters in Uzbekistan, representing at least 8 administrative territorial formations (PEL

²⁵ Before election day, PEC members handed over a numbered personal invitation card to each and every registered voter in their designated area

art. 24-2). The signatures were to be collected between 22 October and 7 November 2007. The deadline for submission of documents to CEC for registration of candidates for Uzbek Presidency was 11 November 2007.

Initially there were 6 nominees for presidency. These were publicly announced by respective political parties and an independent initiative group of voters. Four candidates managed to achieve the required 5% of voters' signatures for the support of their candidacies. They were:

Dilorom Tashmuhedova: "Adolat" (Justice) – Social-Democratic Party. Vice speaker of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis

Asliddin Ashurbayevich Rustamov: Peoples Democratic Party. Vice speaker of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis

Islam Karimov: Liberal Democratic Party. President of Uzbekistan since 1991

Akmal Holmatovich Saidov: Initiative Group of Voters (IG). Chairman of the Legislative Chamber's Committee for democratic institutes, NGOs and citizens' self management bodies.

Two candidates left the competition, not being able to collect the necessary number of signatures. These were Akhtam Tursunov and Kurshid Dusrmukhamedov, slated by Self – Sacrifice National Democratic Part (Fidokorlar) and Uzbekistan National Rebirth Democratic Party (Tiklanish) respectively. They are both currently leading the fraction of their respective parties in the Legislative Chamber.

Opposition movements like Birlik and Erk did not slate potential candidates for presidency for the 2007 presidential election. Birlik claimed they failed an attempt to set up an initiative group. Erk had decided to boycott the election because of distrust in the electoral process.²⁶

In Bukhara and Navoiy regions, respective parties and the IG all claimed they had not had problems collecting enough signatures for their respective nominees. The signature exercise was organized through regional and district party structures, collected by party cells/party members in the *mahallas*. For the IG, the signatures were collected by groups established for this purpose.

The Election campaign

The OSCE/ODHIR says in their Press Statement that: "*The election campaign was hardly visible and characterized by the absence of any real competition of ideas and political views*".²⁷ Election campaign officially commenced 21 September 2007. Campaign is regulated by PEL. During campaign, candidates have the right to present

²⁶ OSCE/ODHIR LEOM. Presidential election 2007. Interim Report (5-15 December 2007)

²⁷ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Press release. 24 December 2007

their program, hold meetings with voters and are guaranteed equal access to media (art. 28). Art. 28 further elaborates quite extensively on what programs cannot be directed against, such as: “*sovereignty, integrity and security of the state, shall not inflict harm to health and moral of the people, contain war propaganda, ethnic hatred, racial and religious confrontation, calls for coercive change of constitutional order, actions limiting the constitutional rights and freedoms of the citizens*”. Election related expenditure is only and directly settled by CEC from a central State campaign fund (PEL art.6).

Through CEC, the provinces had received equal number of street posters for the candidates, figuring picture, name and party/group affiliation. In Bukhara, this amounted to two posters pr. candidate pr. district/town. No other campaign material was displayed, or out door campaign activity observed, by LTOs in their AoR.

Meetings with voters were strictly regulated, approved by CEC in advance, conducted by respective candidate proxy and in Bukhara led by the Chair of the DEC himself. In Bukhara, the respective candidate proxies had between 3-4 (Adolat and PDP) and 10 (LDP and IG) such meetings with voters. The meetings were not announced publicly (only through party structure), voters were there on invitation and their names and work places were taken down at the entrance. The meetings observed by LTOs were attended by between 150 to 250 people. LTOs observed three such meetings with three different candidate proxies (from LDP, IG and Adolat). The meetings lasted between 15 and 50 minutes. The candidate proxy presented the program, normally followed by short appeals from a women- or a youth branch of the party. No one took the opportunity to ask questions.

No campaigning was allowed in district media/district or local newspapers. Campaigning, or maybe more correctly, advocating for own candidate representative was more or less restricted to respective party newspaper on central level only.

The Media

There is a wide range of officially registered media outlets in Uzbekistan. The primary source of information is TV, while the print media circulation is more limited.

The Constitution recognizes the right to freedom of speech, thoughts and beliefs. In addition every citizen has the right to seek, receive and disseminate information. The exception is information that can disrupt the constitutional order and disclose state secrets.²⁸ Uzbekistan is poorly ranked in terms of freedom of the media.²⁹

PEL has provisions, obliging state media to secure equal conditions and allocate equal share of free air time to all candidates (art. 6, 7, 14 and 28). LEOM found that campaign in the media was very limited. The nature of the campaign, strictly organized and

²⁸ OSCE/ODHIR LEOM. Presidential election 2007. Interim Report (5-15 December 2007)

²⁹ Reporters without Borders, Freedom House, IREX, IPI

controlled by the authorities, gave little or no space for the media to critically probe the political programs and platforms of the candidates and their respective parties/supporting group. While the candidates were allotted fairly equal free air time, it was also established that state television allotted more than 80 % of their relevant news coverage to President Islam Karimov.³⁰

In district and local media and print outlets, LTOs found neutral voter education information disseminated and approved by CEC only. We were told that information material produced locally had to be approved centrally before being broadcasted or publicised.

It is LTOs view that self – censorship is widely exercised, though officially banned. Media is by law obliged to: “*refrain from spreading inadequate/untruthful information and any material defaming or insulting the dignity of a candidate*”.³¹ Self – censorship must be understood in light of such provisions, and Uzbekistan’s poor human rights record, not the least in relation to a free and independent press.

Observation on Polling Day

Area of responsibility

LTO team 2 AoRs were Bukhara and Navoiy regions, situated in the central part of Uzbekistan. Bukhara borders Turkmenistan to the south and Navoiy region to the north. The population of Bukhara region counts 1 384 700. The administrative centre is Bukhara city with a population of 263 400. Other bigger cities are Gijduvan, Romitan and Kagan. Bukhara region has 11 administrative areas (districts and towns). Bukhara region is rich with mineral resources, in addition to rich deposits of natural gas and petroleum. The area is also known for its cotton, textile and silk industry. The Great Silk Road and other caravan routes passed through the ancient city of Bukhara. There are still numerous, very beautiful and carefully restored historical and architectural monuments. The old part of Bukhara city is on the UNESCO World Heritage List and a centre of international tourism.

There were 437 polling stations in Bukhara region, 69 in Bukhara city.

Navoiy borders Bukhara region to the south and Kazakhstan to the north. Navoiy is a nearly three times larger, and much more densely populated region than Bukhara. The population here counts 767 500. The administrative centre is the city of Navoiy, with a population of approximately 128.000. This is a new city, built during Soviet times. The region is divided into 8 administrative districts. Other bigger cities are Uchkuduk and Zaeafshan. Navoiy region has large stocks of natural gas and deposits of precious metals. Navoiy city is a big industrial centre with pit mining, metallurgic and chemical

³⁰ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Press release. 24 December 2007

³¹ OSCE/ODHIR LEOM. Presidential election 2007. Interim Report (5-15 December 2007)

enterprises and plants, including Uzbekistan's largest producers of mineral fertilizers. Some of these enterprises count as many as 30.000 employees.

There were 324 polling stations in Navoiy region, 36 in Navoiy city.

Observation on election day – opening and polling

LEOM did not, as mentioned before, carry out regular e-day observation. The PSs opened at 06.00 and closed at 20.00. On polling day, LTOs visited 7 PSs in Bukhara city and close vicinity, three in the morning and four during late afternoon and evening.

Opening was observed in Bukhara centre. The PS opened on time, main procedures were followed and the work in the PS was led in a competent manner by a female chair. There were very few voters while LTOs were there (nearly one hour).

In all the PSs visited, there were no queues, with a few exceptions, not even a steady flow of voters. At least two party observers were present in every PS. Through the day, LTOs observed some minor procedural problems, like where to sign on the voter list and for which reason. In one PS the voters signed twice, once for receiving a ballot and once (in the column indicating early voting) confirming they had received the written invitation card from PEC. Other lack of uniformity was also observed.

In one PS, a ballot box was found to be very poorly sealed. On another occasion, a mobile ballot box was observed being sealed only when LTOs asked to see the location of this box.

In three of the PSs visited on e-day, LTOs observed a somewhat unfortunate lay out. Voters entered the polling booth with their ballot(s) from one side and left through the other side. The ballot box was located behind the polling booths, out of sight from both PECs and observers. The exception was one PEC member, who was normally present by the box, keeping track of the number of voters who had voted at all times. These numbers were reported to DEC every hour.

On many occasions, LTOs observed voters receiving (and entering the polling booth) with more than one ballot. Likewise, voters were also observed putting more than one ballot in the box (in the open, for everyone to observe). In one case, a voter was observed voting twice. Multiple signatures on the voter lists were observed from early on. By the end of the day, this was more of a rule than an exception, indicating a pattern of proxy voting. This may explain high turn-out figures in spite of the relatively small number of voters observed. Three of the PSs observed by LTOs in Bukhara had nearly 3000 registered voters.

In one PS observed, 18 out of 19 PEC members belonged to the school where the PS was located. The deputy director of the school was chair of this PEC. In another PS, this was the case for 13 out of 13 PEC members, this time the director of the school was acting as chair. A number of visits to PECs before e-day, indicate that such solutions were frequent.

LTOs often observed unauthorized persons in the PSs, such as other employees/directors of the institutions where the PSs were located, volunteers and security personnel.

We arrived at the PS to be observed for closing and counting at 19.35. At this point, the PS was de facto closed and all tables were cleared.

Observation on election day – counting and tabulation

Counting started on time at 20.00. Besides LTOs and two observers from CIS, one party representative from LDP was present. The ballots were distributed among the PEC members and put in piles for each candidate and a pile for spoilt/disputed ballots. The piles were counted twice, but not carefully double checked whether or not all the ballots in a pile really belonged there. Spoilt/disputed ballots were not deliberated on. The numbers for each candidate were read out loud immediately after counting. When the protocol had been filled in, the result was again read out loud. 100 votes had been added to one of the candidates (the Incumbent President Karimov). This adjustment of figures was not explained or accounted for, only announced. An extra 100 ballots meant the protocol added up correctly. LTOs got a copy of the protocol.

We arrived at DEC by 22.30, as the first PS. Candidate representatives from LDP, PDP and IG were present at DEC. The protocol was checked and approved by DEC. At the time when LTOs left DEC, at 02.30 in the morning, only three PSs had arrived with their protocols at DEC Bukhara.

LTOs visited DEC 09.30 on the morning of 24 December. At this point, we were informed that all 437 PS had arrived with their protocols, all of them had been correct and accepted by DEC. We could not receive a copy of the protocol, because there had been a calculation mistake in the transfer of figures from the protocols to the tabulation sheet (which was done by hand). DEC would have to go through everything again, a job stipulated to take 4-5 hours. Chair of DEC had sent his fellow DEC members home to have a couple of hours rest, he was expecting them back in an hour or so (10.30?), to check through all the figures again. We phoned DEC 11.30, only to learn that Chair of DEC had left for Tashkent with the protocol. No copy had been left for us, and since Chair of DEC had left, other DEC members were not in a position to give us a copy of the protocol.

The review of Complaints Process

According to PEL art. 14, 16 and 18, election complaints are dealt with by PEC, DEC and CEC. CEC makes the final decisions. Are complainants not satisfied with the outcome, complaints can be forwarded to the courts.³²

*“The procedures and division of competence for handling electoral complaints and appeals by the election administration and courts appear to lack legal regulation.”*³³

Interlocutors interviewed by LTOs in the regions were unsure whether or not complaints should be forwarded first to election commissions and then to the court. Or if some

³² OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report 4 December 2007

³³ OSCE/ODHIR LEOM. Presidential election 2007. Interim Report (5-15 December 2007)

cases, depending on content, should go directly to court. This seemed to be the view of the Prosecutor of Bukhara region, still not being quite sure which cases should go where.

To LTOs knowledge, no formal complaints were forwarded to any election commission or court at any level in AoR (Bukhara and Navoiy regions).

Conclusions and recommendations

The results for the 2007 presidential election in Uzbekistan were as follows:³⁴

Candidate	Votes	%
Islom Karimov (Uzbekistan Liberal Democratic Party)	13,008,357	90.77
Asliddin Rustamov (Uzbekistan People's Democratic Party)	468,064	3.27
Dilorom Toshmuhamedova (Justice Social Democratic Party)	434,111	3.03
Akmal Saidov (independent)	420,815	2.94
Valid votes	14,331,347	100.00
Invalid votes	434,097	2.94
Total votes (turnout 90.6%)	14,765,444	

Islam Karimov was 16 January 2007 sworn in as President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for another seven years in office. The following day, 17 January, he received a visit from the EU Special Representative to Central Asia, Pierre Morell. Mr. Morell said EU considered Uzbekistan as a reliable partner. EU aimed at strengthening and expanding cooperation with Uzbekistan. 24 January, the President received the

³⁴ Elections.uz

Commander of the US Central Command, Admiral W. J. Fallon. Mr. Fallon expressed a US interest in developing a mutually beneficial cooperation.³⁵ These visits indeed indicate a mutual wish for a better dialogue and closer cooperation between Uzbekistan and the wider international community.

OSCE/ODIHR Press Statement on 24 December claims that: “*Strictly controlled Uzbek elections did not offer a genuine choice*”. The election generally failed to meet many OSCE Commitments for democratic elections.

In spite of absence of any real competition of ideas and political views, observers have made note of the fact that four candidates ran for the 2007 presidential election, a woman and a candidate fielded from civil society groups included. Some positive changes had been introduced to the legislative framework, like the possibility for an initiative group to field a candidate. Finally, it was LTOs impression that the election administration bodies showed commitments and diligence in their work.

To secure a framework for elections in line with OSCE Commitments and a political context favouring a democratic development, a number of aspects should be addressed.

Relevant legislation has to ensure basic democratic principles like equal rights for all Uzbek citizens to run for office, freedom of speech, access to information and freedom of assembly. There is a general need for Uzbek authorities to increase respect for and secure basic human rights provided for in the Uzbek Constitution and in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Uzbekistan is a signature. Some of the restrictions that exist to-day, or maybe even more importantly, selective use of restrictions to suppress or wing-clip critical voices/opposition forces do not commensurate with OSCE Commitments like ensuring a level playing ground for elections. Another important OSCE Commitment that Uzbek authorities need to address promptly is the right for candidates, parties and voters to campaign in an atmosphere without interference from administrative authorities and without fear of intimidation or retribution of any kind. Public policy should work to permit an open and pluralistic political debate where government policy, for better or for worse, can be scrutinized and discussed. This is necessary to enable the electorate to make informed choices. An open and pluralistic political debate is also essential for democratic development.

Committed to their work, there is a need to further secure the independence of the election administration body on all levels. The possibility of including representatives from political parties ought to be considered.

The decision on 3 December 2004 to abolish the possibility for domestic non-partisan observation was very unfortunate, a step back, and contrary to the Copenhagen Document. There is a need to secure provisions in the legal framework for domestic observers from non-partisan civil society groups.

³⁵ <http://uza.uz/en/politics/154/>

Comments on the election observation mission

The decision by OSCE/ODIHR to observe the 2007 presidential election in Uzbekistan was made very late. The invitation from the Uzbek authorities came as early as September 2007, but late issuance of visas meant that the NAM could only take place as late as 28-30 November, a little more than 3 weeks before e-day. To deploy a full scale election observation mission was therefore not possible. Uzbek authorities also restricted the number of OSCE observers to 25.

The OSCE Press Statement following the election for deputies to the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 26 December 2004 states that this election “*fell significantly short of OSCE Commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, despite minor improvements identified in the election law*”. A number of concerns regarding the democratic nature of the upcoming presidential election in Uzbekistan are also raised by OSCE/ODIHR in the 4 December 2007 NAM report, included whether or not the Uzbek authorities have taken the necessary steps to bring election legislation and policy in line with OSCE Commitments and international standards. Still, a decision was made to secure OSCE presence, though limited. The aim was to assess the legal and administrative framework, aspects of the campaign and importantly, to maintain a dialogue with the authorities and the civil society and offer recommendations for improvements.

LTOs were always received in an open and welcoming way, with the friendliness and hospitality Central Asia is well known for. The election administration body, and the District Election Commissions especially, were helpful and forthcoming. The nature of the political context in Uzbekistan still made it difficult to access a variety of relevant information. People are in general very careful about (or avoid totally) expressing views or sharing information of a critical character, especially in regard to the Incumbent and his government’s policy.

LTOs in Bukhara/Navoiy felt no direct interference in our work, with some minor exceptions. Hotel arrangements were decided in advance and could not be changed. On 22 December, we were by DEC Navoiy asked not to visit PEC’s in their province, to avoid disturbing last moment preparation. This was a CEC decision. 24 December, the Ministry of Interior asked LEOM to identify (by numbers) all PSs visited by OSCE on e-day.

There is a need to communicate that interlocutors, also some representatives from civil society, wanted OSCE to make note of the fact this election was somewhat different from before. There were 4 candidates, one of them female and one nominated from civil society groups. “*Even though we know very well that this is not democracy the way you know it, we choose to see it as start. And we see it in light of the fact that we have only had 16 years of independence*”.³⁶ LTOs believe one also has to keep in mind that many Uzbeks are preoccupied with their geopolitical location, stability and a strong wish for a peaceful development. Many interlocutors (or voters) most likely did not see the other

³⁶ Interlocutor from a political party

candidates as an alternative to the Incumbent. Still others claimed that there are some small openings and some positive changes taking place, giving reason for some optimism. We were told about civic organizations which have now succeeded in being reregistered after being closed down in the aftermath of Andijon. Small scale private businesses are encouraged, sometimes even actively supported.

The late arrival of both core staff and observers created some logistical challenges. LEOM never succeeded in getting technical equipment (computers, printers, satellite phones etc.) through custom. LTOs were well briefed before deployment, and in spite little equipment, LTOs were followed up during deployment in a very satisfactory way. The mission was led in a competent manner and core staff balanced well the demand for relevant information with the necessary flexible attitude. It is LTOs opinion that a decision to secure OSCE presence during the 2007 presidential election was the right decision, and hope that our presence and recommendations will be of help for future democratic development in Uzbekistan.

Appendices

Observing organisation's statement/preliminary report

LIMITED ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION – UZBEKISTAN 2007

Strictly controlled Uzbek elections did not offer a genuine choice, ODIHR observers conclude

TASHKENT, 24 December 2007 – Yesterday's presidential election in Uzbekistan was held in a strictly controlled political environment, leaving no room for real opposition, and the election generally failed to meet many OSCE commitments for democratic elections. The recommendations issued by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), after the 2004 parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan have not yet been implemented. This is the conclusion of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM), deployed on 5 December following an invitation by the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“In the context of democratic development, it is notable that this time there were more candidates than in earlier presidential elections, including a female candidate and a nonpartisan candidate nominated by an initiative group. But since all candidates in the present election publicly endorsed the incumbent, the electorate was deprived of a genuine choice,” said Ambassador Walter Siegl, who led the election observation mission.

The election campaign was hardly visible and characterized by the absence of any real competition of ideas and political views. The campaign materials, produced by the Central Election Commission (CEC), and mainly displayed in the premises of the

election administration, provided only neutral information on candidates' profiles and political programmes.

The coverage of the campaign in the media was very limited, without debates among candidates, direct speeches or the presentation of alternative views, which could help the electorate to make an informed choice. Despite fairly equal allocation of free airtime to the candidates, the LEOM media monitoring established that state television allotted over 80 per cent of their relevant news coverage to President Islam Karimov.

The mission recognizes that some positive changes have been introduced into the legislation since the previous presidential election, such as allowing candidates nominated by initiative groups to run and establishing *positive* voting for a candidate instead of against one or more candidates. However, the registration of political parties as legal entities and of candidates for presidential elections remains subject to excessively high requirements for supporting signatures. The presidential election law is not in line with paragraph 7.5 of the Copenhagen Document as it bans registration of candidates of certain categories of citizens. In addition, while the legislation provides for international election observers, observation by domestic civil society groups - not fielding a candidate - was abolished in 1997, contrary to paragraph 8 of the Copenhagen Document.

The legislative framework and the existing administrative practices do not ensure the implementation of the Constitutional provision for freedom of assembly. The LEOM noted concerns expressed by many interlocutors regarding further violations of civil and political rights, as contained in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Uzbekistan is a signatory.

As the incumbent has been President since Uzbekistan declared independence in 1991, his registration as a presidential candidate raises legal issues in light of constitutional restrictions allowing only two consecutive terms.

The election administration at all levels showed commitment to their tasks and the Central Election Commission produced extensive training materials for the election officials. Regarding the administrative framework, important elements of the election procedures remain under-regulated. Vaguely framed early voting and homebound voting procedures raise concerns. Moreover, the rules fail to provide for full disclosure of CEC decisions or for publication of election results by polling stations.

The LEOM was received in a friendly manner by the members of the election administration and was overall supported by the authorities, but was not given access to all documentation, including CEC decisions. Despite repeated requests, the mission did not have an opportunity to meet and discuss with candidates, and was able to observe only one meeting between a candidate and the electorate.

While the LEOM did not conduct a systematic observation on election day, its members visited polling stations in and around Tashkent and in five other regions. The observers noted a calm voting atmosphere, a frequent presence of law enforcement agents inside polling stations, a lack of uniformity in the preparation of voter lists and multiple signatures on voters lists indicating a pattern of proxy voting. During the vote count and tabulation, observers noted procedural problems and irregularities, such as adjustments of figures which could not be satisfactorily explained and protocols filled out in pencil.

The unusually high turnout of 90,6 per cent reported by the CEC, in particular in light of the small number of voters observed by the mission, raises further concerns regarding the accuracy of the reporting of results.

“The OSCE/ODIHR stands ready to assist Uzbekistan to live up to its commitment to holding democratic elections and underlines the need for a continued meaningful dialogue and commensurate political will to achieve this aim,” said Ambassador Siegl.

Other relevant organisations statement/preliminary report

CIS Mission: ‘Elections Were Important For Further Democratization of Public Life In Uzbekistan’

On December 24 the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Observer Mission at the presidential elections in Uzbekistan of December 23 held a news conference at the Press Center of Central Election Commission, according to the national newspapers.

The local and foreign journalists, international observers and representatives of diplomatic corps in Uzbekistan participated at it, according to the reports.

The head of the CIS Observer Mission, the Chairman of Executive Committee – CIS Executive Secretary Sergey Lebedev has read out the Statement of CIS Observer Mission on the results of observing the preparation and holding of presidential election.

According to the Statement, 79 international observers, who have represented the executive, election bodies of the CIS participating states, as well as the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization (EurAsEc) and the CIS Executive Committee, have been accredited to participate in the elections as observers.

Observing the election processes began from December 10. The Mission headquarters has operated in Tashkent with the branch offices to have functioned in Bukhara, Samarkand and Ferghana provinces. For over the entire period of monitoring the election campaign the observers attended 1207 polling stations, including 703 on the day of voting in Andijan, Bukhara, Jizzakh, Samarkand, Tashkent, Ferghana provinces and the city of Tashkent.

In keeping with the Statement, the necessary legal, organizational and logistical conditions for the international and domestic observing the preparation for presidential elections and voting have been created in Uzbekistan. The CIS observers have had an access to the documents, which regulate the election process, were able to meet with the heads of campaign headquarters of presidential nominees and voters, attended the precinct and district election commissions in the country and gained the necessary information.

Mission has worked alongside with the Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan and attended the meetings of candidates with the voters. Observers have received the

comprehensive assistance by all local structures in accomplishing the work. The CIS Observer Mission is reported to have noted that the elections of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan were free, open and transparent.

As a part of his stay, on December 25 this year Sergey Lebedev has been received at the Oksaroy Residence in Tashkent by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, in which the Uzbek leader has highly assessed the work of the Mission in Uzbekistan.

Mr. Lebedev is reported to have thanked the President for the frank welcome and congratulated him on his victory in the elections.