
PRELIMINARY STATEMENT
BY THE INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION
TO THE ROMANIA LOCAL ELECTIONS

February 11, 1992
Bucharest, Romania

The International Observer Delegation organized by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is pleased to offer this preliminary statement on the February 9 local elections. Our delegation, comprised of 30 members from 10 countries, observed the elections in 16 regions throughout Romania.

The delegation includes parliamentarians, political party leaders, election experts, legal scholars, judges, regional specialists, and elected officials. The observation mission sought to demonstrate the international community's support for the democratization process in Romania. Many of these delegates participated in the Institutes' activities in Romania, including observation of the May 1990 elections.

During the campaign period, the Institutes were present to monitor the pre-election environment. The delegation's mandate included the examination of three aspects of the election process: the campaign, the balloting and the tabulation of results. Our statement is an assessment of these findings of the election process to date. The Institutes will issue a detailed report after the upcoming run-off elections.

The delegation arrived in Romania on February 5. Prior to the election, the delegates met with government and elected officials, political party leaders, journalists, civic monitoring organizations, candidates, and election commissions.

This election represents a meaningful step forward for the process of democratization in Romania. The delegation was particularly struck by the active participation of political parties and civic organizations in the electoral process. Their activities gave concrete expression to the Romanian people's desire for a genuine democracy.

The delegation notes a number of positive developments since the 1990 elections. These include:

a more open and tolerant political environment for discourse and debate;

a marked decrease in violence and intimidation;

greater understanding and respect for the secrecy of the ballot;

improved access to the media;

enhanced political party participation in the administration of the electoral process; and

the widespread participation of domestic observers.

Despite these positive features, the election process was not without problems. The campaign suffered significant limitations. First, although the level of intimidation and harassment was markedly lower than in 1990, the delegation did receive credible reports of scattered incidents such as telephone threats, beatings and job loss. The delegation was also concerned with the disqualification of certain candidates who were allegedly barred without adequate review procedures. Second, the mechanisms for access to media were inadequate to ensure an effective flow of information and there was still a disturbing degree of state control over the means and forms of information distribution. Third, there clearly existed a significant imbalance between the resources of the ruling party and those of its challengers. Efforts to address these two latter points were inadequate, and to the extent they were achieved came late in the process.

Although the voting and counting were generally orderly, the delegation did observe wide-spread procedural inconsistencies as well as isolated irregularities. Examples of irregularities observed by the delegation included inaccurate voter lists, proxy voting, inadequate verification of voter identity, the presence of police and military personnel inside the voting sections, inappropriate conduct of "technical assistants," and occasional partiality by some election officials and appointed authorities. While no irregularity can be condoned, the delegation did not receive evidence that these irregularities influenced the outcome of the elections in the locations where they occurred. *

The delegation heard numerous complaints from election officials, political party representatives and domestic monitors that, beyond a general election law, there were no detailed written procedures on the administration of the election. Areas of ambiguity included disposition of unused ballots, vote counting methods, filling vacated positions on electoral commissions, and voter identification. More important, there was uncertainty regarding which officials were responsible for clarifying these ambiguities when problems arose. Despite these procedural inconsistencies, the delegation observed that generally, election officials worked

together diligently to administer the elections properly.

During the delegation's visit, government officials, political party leaders and members of civic groups, expressed a shared commitment to pursue reforms that would further strengthen the electoral process. In light of the upcoming run-offs and anticipated national elections, the delegation recommends that the members of the government, political parties and parliament immediately establish a mechanism, such as a roundtable negotiation, for achieving consensus on key electoral reforms. Given the significance of the national elections, it is critical that Romanian democratic political forces share the responsibility for negotiating and implementing these measures prior to the onset of the electoral campaign.

In the spirit of democratic cooperation demonstrated by our presence, the delegation offers the following specific recommendations:

1. Although it is commendable to have minimal barriers to creating political parties, there appears to be wide agreement in Romania that the 251-person membership criterion for a party to propose candidates should be reconsidered in order to diminish the fractionalization of the political party system.
2. In the interest of maximum transparency, public disclosure of and access to copies of voter lists should be made available to political parties and civic groups. In addition, disclosure laws concerning party funding and assets should be enacted.
3. To enhance information available to voters, the following efforts should be made: a) ensure a wider and more reliable distribution of newspapers throughout the country; b) reconsider public financing of political parties; c) enact a democratic audiovisual law.
4. A body should be identified within the government or the electoral commission to promulgate detailed procedures concerning the administration of elections. Moreover, efforts should be made to maximize the impartial administration of elections at all levels.
5. Recognizing that the existing voter lists are in some cases inaccurate, additional measures should be identified to ensure the integrity of the lists.
6. Measures should be explored to ensure maximum enfranchisement of students, the sick and elderly. In addition, no exception to the residency requirement should be made for conscripts.

7. Ways should be found to reduce the evident fatigue of polling site officials during the voting and counting process. One possibility would be to have two shifts of officials for each site.

8. Given the important role that domestic observers played in this electoral process, provision for domestic observers should be made a permanent component of the Romanian electoral process.

9. The delegation also recommends the development of wider voter education programs, including the posting of voting procedures inside polling sites.

10. As was noted by the 1990 observer delegation, a nonpartisan body should be empowered to investigate vigorously all complaints regarding the electoral process -- the campaign, voting, and counting. Such investigations should continue after the elections if necessary, and those persons found responsible for illegal actions should be prosecuted. The nonpartisan body must have sufficient resources to carry out its responsibilities and issue public reports on its findings.

There is a real opportunity to build on the successes of the February 9 elections. We are hopeful that our observations and recommendations will be helpful in the planning for the upcoming national elections. The international community, deeply impressed by the democratic aspirations of the Romanian people, is committed to assist in any appropriate way. The delegation thanks the Romanian government, the political parties, civic groups and others whose openness and cooperation made this observation mission possible.