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NDI ELECTION MISSION RECOMMENDS MEASURES TO INCREASE VOTER CONFIDENCE IN UKRAINE

Points to Polarization and Concerns about Abuse of Authority

KYIV – Noting a high level of political polarization and cynicism in Ukraine’s electoral environment, a National Democratic Institute (NDI) pre-election observation mission said actions are urgently needed to increase transparency and build voter confidence before Oct. 31 local elections.

In a [joint statement](#) issued today with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the delegation said the last several elections in Ukraine, including the presidential election earlier this year, were widely considered to meet international standards for democratic elections. “The Oct. 31 local elections represent an important opportunity to build on and consolidate that accomplishment,” the statement said.

NDI said it welcomed the pledge by President Victor Yanykovich to ensure that the elections, the first since he took office, are democratic, noting that the legal framework for local elections contains improvements over previous laws. “However,” the statement said, “additional measures are urgently needed in the implementation of the laws to increase transparency and build voter confidence in this election.”

NDI said it had continuing concerns regarding both the legal framework for the elections and the conduct of the campaign. It cited such specific problem areas as:

- A pattern of harassment of candidates and civic activists by government officials;
- The composition of Territorial Election Commissions (TECs), which opposition groups have denounced as unfair;
- Pressures on media;
- Issues with local party branch representation;
- Impediments to observation by domestic election monitoring groups; and
- A shortened timeframe for the campaign period.

The statement also put forward a number of recommendations for the Oct. 31 polls, as well as for the longer term. For the short term, they included:

- Investigation of allegations of misconduct by public officials surrounding the elections, including any form of harassment or interference with candidates or observers;
- Ensuring a level playing field and an enabling environment for free elections;
- Barring the use of administrative resources to benefit the campaign of any candidate or party; and
- Expedient consideration of requests from domestic monitoring organizations.

For the longer term, the recommendations included:

- Full investigation of complaints of government pressure on the business interests of media owners;
- Strengthening the independence of the judiciary to advance the rule of law and create greater public confidence in the court system;
- Exploration by the parliament of options for setting up nonpartisan, independent electoral commissions based on a consensus of the major parties;
- Accompanying further revisions to the election law by an open and transparent process of consultation, aiming at the broadest possible consensus; and
- Simplified procedures for accreditation of domestic observers and lengthening of timelines for accreditation.

The NDI delegation was co-led by David Collenette, a member of the Canadian House of Commons for more than 20 years, and Katie Fox of the United States, NDI's deputy director for Eurasia programs. Other members were Jennifer Collins-Foley (U.S.), executive director of the Center for National Policy, and Eka Siradze-Delaunay (Georgia), executive director of the Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, representing the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO).

The Oct. 3-7 delegation assessed electoral preparations and the pre-election environment, including campaign activities, the electoral legal framework, legal mechanisms for addressing electoral complaints, the role of domestic nonpartisan observers, and the accuracy of media reports and their influence on public opinion. Members met with party leaders, senior government officials, election authorities, nongovernmental organizations and representatives of the media.

More information about the IFES assessment delegation's findings and recommendations can be found at www.ifes.org.

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The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information is available at www.ndi.org.