

21 May 1990
PRELIMINARY DELEGATION STATEMENT

We are pleased to offer this preliminary statement on behalf of the International Observer Delegation organized jointly by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the National Republican Institute for International Affairs (NRIIA). Our delegation is comprised of 60 members from 19 nations. Our groups have deployed to 10 regions around Romania and are here in the Bucharest area. Some of these teams are still in the field and we are in touch with them by telephone.

This preliminary statement is issued on the basis of our analysis of the campaign period and on what we have seen during yesterday's election and the early stages of the counting. We expect to make a further more comprehensive report at a later time.

Any judgement on the Romanian elections, the first multi-party electoral contests in nearly half a century, must take into account the national trauma inflicted on the people of Romania by decades of brutal communist dictatorships. Consequently the country faced the election, only five months after the December revolution, without the political experience, preparation, and infrastructure which would have permitted a completely free and fair election. The democratic opposition should be congratulated for its willingness to compete vigorously under such difficult circumstances.

The process was flawed. But the very fact that an election has taken place is itself a remarkable achievement which none of us would have believed possible a year ago. The delegation recognizes that there has been a significant political opening in Romania since the December 22 revolution: political parties have now organized, there is greater freedom of expression, and hope for the future is developing.

As we noted however, the election process was far from perfect. Key among the areas of greatest concern to our delegation are:

-- The centralized means of creating and distributing political information remain under the control of the government led by the National Salvation Front. This situation prevented opposition views from being effectively presented in all regions of the country. Specifically, the government did not permit the establishment of an independent printing facility or of independent broadcasting.

-- The government did not promptly and vigorously condemn incidents of intimidation including attacks on opposition candidates and party activists. Nor has the government adequately identified former securitate personnel nor brought to trail those who fired on the people during the December revolution. Both these situations have added to the distrust and suspicion which exists among a large portion of the electorate.

-- Finally, the general attitude of the National Salvation Front toward opposition parties and groups did not serve to promote a genuinely pluralistic and tolerant political environment.

Against the background, the people of Romania displayed a remarkable enthusiasm for democracy. Regardless of the ultimate outcomes of the election, the final decision of the Romanian voters deserves our respect.

Our teams did note instances of irregularities, but we did not observe systematic electoral fraud. Isolated instance of ballot box stuffing have been reported, as have incidents in which adequate physical control of the ballots was not maintained. We also are concerned at the frequency of instance, particularly in rural areas, in which electoral authorities assisted voters inside the voting booths. While this situation may have arisen from a lack of understanding and the complexity of the balloting process, it is nonetheless inconsistent with the principle of a secret ballot. There was also a general inconsistency in the application of the "voted" stamp to identity cards which could have allowed for multiple voting.

Given all of these factors, this election can be a significant step on the road to democracy. We cannot be more conclusive at this time because so much more remains to be done. The burdens and responsibilities for democratization will fall largely on the shoulders of the elected representatives and leaders of this country. All of the democratic institutions and parties will have to remain active and engaged in the effort to bring stable democracy to Romania.

The democratic credentials of the National Salvation Front have not been fully established by this election. If victorious, the front must take greater steps toward establishing a genuinely pluralistic political environment. These include:

-- Guaranteeing a free press, allowing the creation and distribution of printed material, and the development of an independent electronic media.

-- Engage in meaningful dialogue with opposition groups -- including the students -- in an effort to achieve genuine national reconciliation. Such reconciliation will also require an attitude of greater tolerance of respect of opposition voices by the National Salvation Front.

-- Encourage and cooperate in the development of a nationwide civic and voter education program to address the consequences of the 45 years of communist domination.

-- And above all to promote the adoption of a democratic constitution and institutions at all levels which guarantee political and human rights for all Romanian citizens.

In closing, we note that this election will produce a short-term transitional government and that new elections will follow the adoption of a constitution. This transition government will be judged on its actions as well as its words. In addressing the challenges of Romanian society the government should note the words of a student leader who told our delegation that "the greatest evils inherited from the previous government are inertia and fear."

In the days ahead, our delegation offers the courageous people of Romania our solidarity and steadfast support as they embark upon a new era of democratic freedoms and responsibilities.