



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

GENERAL ELECTION
7 May 2015

OSCE/ODIHR Election Expert Team
Final Report



Warsaw
22 July 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
II.	INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
III.	ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK	2
IV.	ELECTION ADMINISTRATION	3
V.	VOTER REGISTRATION	4
VI.	PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE	6
VII.	RECOMMENDATIONS	8
	A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS	9
	B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS	9
	ANNEX: FINAL RESULTS	10
	ABOUT THE OSCE/ODIHR	11

**UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
GENERAL ELECTION
7 May 2015**

OSCE/ODIHR Election Expert Team Final Report

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following an invitation from the United Kingdom (UK) Delegation to the OSCE and based on the findings and conclusions of a Needs Assessment Mission deployed from 2 to 5 March, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed an Election Expert Team (EET) to observe the 7 May general election. The OSCE/ODIHR EET focused on particular aspects related to the implementation of legislation and application of election procedures, voter registration and campaign finance.

Overall, the legal framework provides a sound basis to conduct genuine elections. However, the legal framework is voluminous, fragmented and repetitive with differences in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Comprehensive reform of the electoral framework began in 2012 and is expected to be proposed to parliament by 2017. Ahead of the 2015 general election, parliament introduced a number of amendments, some addressing previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, including allowing voters in line at the close of polling to vote, extending and harmonizing timetables for different elections, and introducing additional safeguards for postal voting. In 2013, the government suspended the review of constituency boundaries resulting in the majority of the constituencies being at odds with legal requirements, which undermines the principle of equality of the vote.

The voter registration process underwent a significant change for this election. Legislation introducing Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was passed in 2013 with broad political support. The transition from household (collective) electoral registration to IER began in 2014 and is ongoing. Voters who fail to confirm their identity by the time the transition to IER is complete will be removed from the voter register. The Electoral Commission (EC) issued a report evaluating the practical aspects of implementing IER and completeness of the voter registers, and recommended that the current IER transition deadline of December 2016 be retained.

The party and campaign finance regulatory framework is adequate to ensure transparency and accountability and enjoys public trust. Recent legal amendments include additional reporting requirements for third-parties and increased expenditure limits for parties and candidates. Some interlocutors expressed concern that the new legislation was passed without sufficient public consultation and that third-party finances are over-regulated.

Limited public funding is provided, mainly to opposition parties; however, the majority of all party income is derived from private contributions. The absence of a limit on donations may allow for undue influence of big donors. Parties, candidates and third-parties are obliged to submit financial reports on income and expenditure. However, the framework could benefit from timelier reporting, in order to provide voters with comprehensive information on contestants to make a fully informed choice. The EC regulates party and campaign finance of political parties and third-parties and overall, there is public confidence in its oversight capacity.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Following an invitation from the United Kingdom (UK) Delegation to the OSCE and based on the findings and conclusions of a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) deployed from 2 to 5 March, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed an Election Expert Team (EET) to observe the 7 May general election. The OSCE/ODIHR EET consisted of three experts drawn from three OSCE participating States.

The OSCE/ODIHR EET focused on particular aspects related to the implementation of legislation and application of election procedures, voter registration, and campaign finance. Therefore, the report is limited in scope and does not offer an overall assessment of the electoral process. The specific areas under review were assessed for their compliance with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, as well as with national legislation. In line with the OSCE/ODIHR methodology, the OSCE/ODIHR EET did not undertake a comprehensive and systematic observation of the election day procedures. This final report should be read in conjunction with the 2015 OSCE/ODIHR NAM report, which provides additional detail on the electoral process in the UK.¹

The OSCE/ODIHR EET wishes to thank the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, representatives of the election administration, political parties, civil society and other interlocutors for their co-operation and assistance.

III. ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The UK is a constitutional monarchy comprising England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. A bicameral parliament exercises legislative authority through the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The 650 members of the House of Commons are elected under a first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies for a fixed 5-year period. Candidates who receive the highest numbers of valid votes in each constituency are elected.

The delineation of constituency boundaries is managed by the Boundary Commissions for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. When determining the boundaries, commissions consider the borders of local administrative units while maintaining the electoral quota.² A five percent deviation from the electoral quota is legally accepted.

The 2011 Parliamentary Voting System and Constituency Act provided for a number of changes, including a reduction in the number of seats in the House of Commons from 650 to 600, the creation of more equal constituencies, boundary review every five years, and more formalized and extensive public consultations. The changes were originally due to be implemented ahead of the 2015 election, but the legislation was amended with the adoption of the 2013 Electoral Registration and Administration Act (ERAA), which postponed the process of reducing the number of constituencies and reconfiguring constituency boundaries until before the 2020 general election.

¹ [See all previous OSCE/ODIHR reports on the United Kingdom.](#)

² The electoral quota is established by dividing the total number of registered voters by the number of constituencies within each of the four constituent parts of the country.

Significant population changes have occurred since the last boundary review, consequently, the number of registered voters in each constituency for the 2015 general election varied widely.³ The Boundary Commission for England noted that the number of registered voters per constituency ranges from 53,877 to 107,572, with an average of 75,774 voters. Out of the 533 constituencies in England, 343 constituencies deviate by more than five per cent from the electoral quota. The variance in the number of voters per constituency is at odds with national legislation, paragraph 7.3 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, and international standards and good practice to ensure equality of the vote.⁴

The OSCE/ODIHR reiterates its recommendation to address the deviation in constituencies from the electoral quota to ensure equality of the vote.

Electoral legislation includes over 50 pieces of primary and over 170 pieces of secondary legislation. Primary legislation governing the general election includes the 1983 Representation of the People Act (RPA, last amended in 2010), the 2000 Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act (PPERA), the 2006 Electoral Administration Act, the 2009 Political Parties and Elections Act (PPEA), and the ERAA. Secondary legislation, such as statutory instruments, rules and codes of practice, in particular, the Parliamentary Elections Rules are appended to the RPA. Overall, the legal framework, some of which dates back to 1695, provides a sound basis for elections, despite being voluminous, fragmented, and repetitive.⁵ Significant differences for the conduct of the general election exist in legislation applicable to England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

In 2011 and 2013, amendments were adopted, including ending the prerogative power of the Queen *de jure* and of the Prime Minister *de facto* to dissolve the parliament, fixing the date of general elections at five-year intervals, introducing individual electoral registration (IER), and lengthening the period between dissolving the parliament and election day. The amendments addressed some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, including allowing voters in line at the close of polling to vote, extending and harmonizing timetables for different elections, and introducing additional safeguards for postal voting. Other recommendations remain outstanding, such as requiring voter identification at the polls and a mechanism to eliminate multiple voter registrations, enhancing the secrecy of the vote, and ensuring consistency in the way the electoral process is administered.

In 2012, the Law Commissions of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland commenced the work on reforming the electoral framework with the aim of harmonizing and simplifying the electoral legislation, which should be proposed to the parliament by 2017.⁶ A key goal of the reform is to promote consistency in the election administration, including on voter registration, the role of Returning Officers (ROs) and Election Registration Officers (EROs), ballot paper design, the administration of absentee voting, voter secrecy and ballot tracing, and dispute resolution.

IV. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

At the national level, the Cabinet Office (CO) is responsible for developing electoral policy by promulgating regulations relating to the administration of elections and proposing new legislation. The Electoral Commission (EC) is responsible for the registration of political parties, oversight of

³ The most recent constituency reviews were completed in 2007 (England and Northern Ireland), 2004 (Scotland) and 2003 (Wales).

⁴ See also paragraph 21 of the 1996 United Nations Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 25 to Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

⁵ [See the Law Commissions Report: Reflections on a New Structure for the UK's Electoral Law.](#)

⁶ The Law Commission is an independent body tasked to review legislation and recommend reform.

party and campaign finance, monitoring the performance of the election administration, issuing guidance to electoral participants, and some aspects of voter education. The EC is an independent public body reporting to the parliament and does not have a direct role in administering elections; however, it provides support and guidance to ROs and EROs.⁷

The election administration is decentralized in each constituency under the responsibility of locally appointed ROs and EROs.⁸ Ahead of the election, the EC introduced a performance measurement system for election administrators and is authorized to carry out inspections; however, the EC has no power to impose sanctions for underperformance. Furthermore, due to the decentralized nature of running the elections and some under-regulated aspects in the legislation, the OSCE/ODHIR EET noted variations and inconsistent application of procedures by election officials in some constituencies.

In March 2015, the CO issued a regulation that altered the design of the ballot paper and removed the sequential number of each candidate. Although the regulation referenced consultations with the EC, several OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors, including election administrators, raised concerns that this redesign would negatively affect the accuracy and the speed of the ballot count, especially in local elections with multi-member constituencies. The new ballot design did not address the sequential numbering on the reverse side of the ballot directly associated with each voter, which the OSCE/ODIHR has previously recommended to remove as it challenges the secrecy of the vote.

Authorities should consider removing the numbering on the back of the ballot linked to individual voters, which challenges the principle of secrecy of the vote.

V. VOTER REGISTRATION

The right to vote in parliamentary elections is granted to citizens who reach 18 years of age by election day and who are on the voter register in an electoral constituency. Commonwealth citizens residing in the UK and the Republic of Ireland citizens are also eligible to vote. UK citizens living abroad can register and vote by mail or proxy, if they were registered to vote in the UK within the last 15 years.

Contrary to four judgments by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, prisoners do not have the right to vote, irrespective of the gravity of the crime committed.⁹ In 2012, the Ministry of Justice held public consultations and proposed a draft bill to amend the blanket restriction; however, the bill has yet to be adopted.¹⁰

The OSCE/ODIHR reiterates its recommendation that the existing legislation on the suffrage rights of prisoners should be brought in line with the judgments of the ECtHR.

The voter registration system is active and continuous with changes possible up to 12 working days prior to election day. EROs (in Northern Ireland, the Election Office for Northern Ireland) are responsible for the compilation of voter lists. The ERAA established IER to replace the previous

⁷ Three out of nine EC members are women, including the EC's Chairperson.

⁸ In England and Wales, local councils appoint local administration officers as EROs. In Scotland, EROs are officials in charge of land and property valuation. In Northern Ireland, the Chief Electoral Officer is the ERO for each constituency.

⁹ The first ECtHR ruling was in 2005, [Hirst v. the United Kingdom](#), and most recently in 2015, [McHugh and others v. the United Kingdom](#).

¹⁰ The proposed draft bill included three options: a ban for prisoners sentenced to four years or more, a ban for prisoners sentenced for more than six months, or a restatement of the existing ban.

household-based (collective) registration. The transition to IER commenced in England, Wales, and Scotland in 2014 and is ongoing. The law sets the IER transition deadline for 31 December 2016, with the option of bringing it forward to the end of December 2015.¹¹ Northern Ireland adopted the IER system in 2002 and phased out household registration by 2006.¹²

The IER system required individuals to confirm their inclusion in voter lists through a multi-step verification process. Individuals must provide their residence address, date of birth, and national insurance number, which are matched against information in the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) database. The EC monitors the transition to IER and has issued periodic progress reports. In December 2014, based on successful DWP data matching, the EC concluded that 87 per cent of the voters in Great Britain were automatically transferred to the new IER system. For voters not yet transferred, EROs utilized information in locally managed databases, such as tax or library rolls for data matching. Additionally, the new law obliged EROs to mail at least two reminders to unregistered voters and to follow-up with a home visit. Several EROs described this process as redundant, overly bureaucratic, time-consuming, and often requiring the hiring of additional staff.

Under the transitional provisions of the IER, voters registered under the previous household system, and whose identity remained unconfirmed, were ‘carried forward’ onto the voter list for this election. However, if these voters fail to confirm their identity by the time the transition to IER is complete, they will be removed from the voter register. In Great Britain, a nationwide household canvass will commence in July 2015 and anyone previously ‘carried forward’ as well as new voters will need to complete an individual voter registration application.

In Great Britain, an online voter registration system was launched by the CO in March 2015, via a constituency based web-portal. Political parties, candidates, media and citizen organizations urged and campaigned for voters to utilize the online registration.¹³ While applicants could register online, they were unable to verify their status to determine if they were already registered. OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors noted the significant effort and time required by EROs to verify the high number of duplicate registrations submitted online, including on election day.¹⁴

Consideration could be given to configuring the online registration system to enable voters to verify their status, including the eligibility for different elections.

The EC undertook a comprehensive public information campaign on broadcast and social media, including in Welsh and some 20 foreign languages, to alert voters about the new requirement to individually register. The CO complemented these efforts by providing funding to organizations working with first-time voters, students, single-parent families, people in rented properties, and persons with disabilities. In addition, EROs undertook local voter registration outreach initiatives.¹⁵

¹¹ The [EC issued a report in June 2015](#) evaluating the practical aspects of implementing IER and the accuracy and completeness of the voter registers. The EC report recommends the current IER transition deadline of December 2016 be retained.

¹² In Northern Ireland, a three-month qualifying period for registration applies to newcomers and home movers, unlike in Great Britain, where a resident may apply for inclusion in a voter register immediately. Additionally, the annual canvass provision does not extend to Northern Ireland, and online voter registration is not permitted.

¹³ In total, some 2,296,530 application forms were filed online, including 469,000 on the last day of registration. The age group of 25 to 34 years applied online in the greatest numbers.

¹⁴ Voters with multiple residences may register to vote in more than one constituency for certain types of local elections.

¹⁵ Innovative outreach included placing reminder messages on shop receipts and conducting registration events with academic enrollment.

Beginning in 2014 and up until election day, EROs made significant and repeated efforts to contact postal voters whose registrations were not verified under the IER system. In some cases, late verification delayed the mailing of some postal ballots, and may have impacted ability of some voters to vote.¹⁶

Since 2000, any voter in Great Britain may apply for a postal vote. In Northern Ireland, postal voting is only available to people who are unable to vote in person.¹⁷ Previous rules governing postal voting “on demand” led to allegations and several proven cases of absentee ballot fraud in Great Britain. Following the 2010 general election, additional safeguards were enacted to enhance public confidence in the integrity of postal voting. For the 2015 general election, postal voters were required to be IER-verified prior to being issued a postal ballot and to provide their national insurance number in addition to the date of birth and signature. ROs were required to verify these personal identifiers on all returned postal ballots.

A number of ROs in England, Scotland and Wales, informed the OSCE/ODIHR EET that approximately three per cent of the postal ballots were rejected due to mistakes such as entering the date of posting instead of date of birth or transposing month and day in the date of birth.¹⁸ ROs lamented at having to reject a large number of postal ballots with such inaccuracies even though signatures and national insurance numbers were verified.

Consideration could be given to reviewing the rules to allow ROs to request voters to correct their application or to accept postal ballots in clear cases of transposition mistakes following the verification of voter personal identifiers.

VI. PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The primary legislation covering party and campaign finance is comprehensive and consists of the PPEA, PPERA, RPA, and the 2014 Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigners and Trade Union Administration Act (Lobbying Act). It covers rules on donations, expenditures, disclosure and reporting requirements as well as sanctions for non-compliance. Rules are more rigorous during the ‘short campaign’ period compared to the ‘long campaign’.¹⁹

Campaign finance rules are applicable to political parties, candidates, and third-parties.²⁰ Overall, the campaign finance regulatory system is adequate to ensure transparency of the process and enjoys public trust. However, it could benefit from additional safeguards to enhance integrity and accountability. By 2012, four of six Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommendations related to party and campaign finance had been addressed.²¹

¹⁶ The number of overseas registered voters nearly quadrupled compared to 2010, from 32,739 to 105,845 voters.

¹⁷ Additionally, postal votes in Northern Ireland are only sent to addresses in the UK, and cannot be handed in by voters at polling stations on election day.

¹⁸ For the 2010 general election, 3.8 per cent of postal ballots were rejected. The [EC report](#) states that “while it is clearly important that measures are in place that are effective in detecting and preventing fraud, these measures should not inadvertently disenfranchise voters who simply make mistakes on their postal ballot statements.”

¹⁹ The ‘long campaign’ is the period from the call of the election until the parliament is dissolved, while the ‘short campaign’ is the period after the parliament is dissolved.

²⁰ ‘Third-parties’ are individuals or organizations that campaign in the run-up to the elections but are not standing as political parties or candidates. They may campaign for or against one or more parties or candidates or on policies or issues closely associated with a party or category of candidates.

²¹ [See GRECO Third Evaluation Round, Second Compliance Report on the UK, 21 June 2012](#). Outstanding recommendations included transparency of candidate loans and a more proactive police role regarding political funding offences.

Recent legal amendments, introduced in 2014, include additional reporting requirements for third-parties and increased expenditure limits for parties and candidates. Some OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors complained about insufficient consultations ahead of adopting the new rules.

Limited public funding is provided, mostly to opposition parties.²² In addition, electoral contestants are entitled to discounted postal services, free use of public venues for campaign events, and free airtime on television. For the first time, public subsidies were provided for prospective candidates with disabilities.²³ The majority of party income is derived from private contributions. There are no limits on the number or value of donations, which may allow for undue influence of big donors. In 2014, approximately a quarter of all funding provided to parties came from 25 individuals.²⁴

Consideration could be given to limiting the amount a single donor may contribute to a candidate or political party in a year, in order to ensure that the democratic process is not distorted by undue influence of big donors, in line with Recommendation (2003) 4 of the Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers.

Limits on campaign spending by parties are distinct from those for third-party campaigners and candidates and depend on the number of seats contested. Parties may choose to comply with either one of the two formulas for calculation of spending limits: GBP 30,000 multiplied by the number of constituencies contested (approximately GBP 19,5 million in total) or fixed amounts up to GBP 810,000 in England, 120,000 in Scotland, 60,000 in Wales.²⁵ In addition, during the ‘long campaign’ each candidate may spend GBP 30,700 plus a premium per voter and during the ‘short campaign’ up to GBP 8,700 plus a premium.²⁶ A third-party may spend a maximum of GBP 450,000 UK-wide, GBP 9,750 for or against a party in a single constituency and up to GBP 700 for or against a single candidate.²⁷ There are no expenditure limits per constituency for parties and candidates. Some OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors voiced concerns that the lack of an expenditure ceiling at the constituency level allows parties to target financial resources to certain constituencies, creating a potential for considerable disparity in campaign spending among contestants in individual constituencies.²⁸

Consideration could be given to adhering to a single formula for calculation of expenditure limits for political parties in view of ensuring equality and consistency of financial rules.

During the ‘long campaign’, reports on donations and loans received by political parties and third-parties must be submitted quarterly to the EC and weekly during the ‘short campaign’.²⁹ Itemized

²² In 2014, funding to opposition parties amounted to GBP 16,689 (1 EUR = GBP 0.7) for every seat, plus GBP 33 for every 200 votes gained by the party. Moreover, funds from the Policy Development Fund are allocated to parties with at least two seats or one seat and more than 150,000 votes in the last general election. In 2014, the Fund amounted to GBP two million.

²³ See <http://www.access-to-elected-office-fund.org.uk>.

²⁴ In 2014, a total of GBP 62,276,512 was donated to political parties. Of this, GBP 15,771,655 (25 per cent) was donated by 25 individuals. In some cases, a single donor contributed as much as GBP 1.5 million. GBP 8,053,279 was donated by trade unions almost exclusively to the Labour Party.

²⁵ These limits are applicable during the ‘regulated period’, which starts one year prior to election day. For Northern Ireland there are no fixed amounts and the first formula applies.

²⁶ The premium per voter is 6 pence for counties and 9 pence for boroughs.

²⁷ Expenditure limit for non-party campaigners is GBP 319,800 in England, 55,400 in Scotland, 44,000 in Wales, and 30,800 in Northern Ireland.

²⁸ See ICCPR General Comment 25, section 19: ‘Reasonable limitations on campaign expenditure may be justified where this is necessary to ensure that the free choice of voters is not undermined or the democratic process distorted by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party.’

²⁹ Donations to parties and third-parties above GBP 7,500 are reportable and must come from a permissible source.

and audited expense reports must be submitted to the EC within three months after the election by political parties and third-parties with a return below GBP 250,000, and within six months by parties with a return above GBP 250,000. Third-parties exceeding an expenditure threshold are required to register with the EC and submit reports on donations and expenses.³⁰

Several OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors noted that civil society organizations and charities, which work on topics of broader social relevance, required to register as third-parties, might be viewed as politicized, while the rules may fail to regulate other third-parties such as individuals, lobbies or organizations directly involved in the campaign. In addition, concerns were raised about the administrative burden placed on third-parties by requiring them to register with the EC, calculate spending, and submit reports. In this respect, some OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors claimed that the new rules caused a ‘chilling effect’ on campaigning by third parties, which were reluctant to conduct campaign activities due to concerns about violating the law.

Consideration could be given to reviewing campaign finance rules pertaining to third-parties, in view of ensuring transparency, integrity and accountability without unduly limiting their activities.

The EC regulates party and campaign finance in the national context, namely for political parties and third-parties, whereas ROs maintain records of candidate finance at the constituency level. The EC issues comprehensive guidance to relevant stakeholders for the implementation of the legislation and makes information publicly available on its website in a searchable format. There is no legal deadline for the EC to make the information public. On 28 May, the EC published information on party finances for the first trimester of 2015. Ten political parties reported donations of approximately GBP 29 million in total.³¹ No information on expenditures was published by the same date.

To enhance transparency, the authorities could consider adopting measures to require parties competing in the elections to accelerate the disclosure of campaign income and expenditure, linking it more closely to election timeframes.

Since 2011, the EC has enhanced investigatory authority and may impose sanctions, including monetary penalties. The EC stated that it has exercised these powers in this election. Breaches of campaign finance rules, such as exceeding expense limits or submitting inaccurate reports are criminal offences and may result in prosecution. In this election, by 10 May, no sanctions were imposed for financial wrongdoings. Overall, there is public confidence in the oversight capacity of the EC, justified by stakeholders also by the high compliance rates of parties.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations contained throughout the text are offered with a view to enhancing the conduct of elections in the UK and bringing them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with past OSCE/ODIHR recommendations that remain to be addressed. The

³⁰ The 2014 Lobbying Act doubled the expenditure threshold for registration of third-parties to GBP 20,000 in England and GBP 10,000 for each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A total of 66 third-parties were registered for this election, twice as many as in the previous election.

³¹ The Conservative Party reported donations of GBP 15.5 million, Labour Party 11.5, Liberal Democratic Party 3, and Scottish National Party and United Kingdom Independence Party approximately one million each. All other parties received donations below one million in total.

OSCE/ODIHR stands ready to assist the UK authorities to further improve the electoral process and in following-up on the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.³²

A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The OSCE/ODIHR reiterates its recommendation to address the deviation in constituencies from the electoral quota to ensure equality of the vote.
2. The OSCE/ODIHR reiterates its recommendation that the existing legislation on the suffrage rights of prisoners should be brought in line with the judgments of the ECtHR.
3. Authorities should consider removing the numbering on the back of the ballot linked to individual voters, which challenges the principle of secrecy of the vote.
4. Consideration could be given to configuring the online registration system to enable voters to verify their status, including the eligibility for different elections.
5. Consideration could be given to reviewing the rules to allow ROs to request voters to correct their application or to accept postal ballots in clear cases of transposition mistakes following the verification of voter personal identifiers.
6. To enhance transparency, the authorities could consider adopting measures to require parties competing in the elections to accelerate the disclosure of campaign income and expenditure, linking it more closely to election timeframes.

B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

7. Consideration could be given to limiting the amount a single donor may contribute to a candidate or political party in a year, in order to ensure that the democratic process is not distorted by undue influence of big donors, in line with Recommendation (2003) 4 of the Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers.
8. Consideration could be given to adhering to a single formula for calculation of expenditure limits for political parties in view of ensuring equality and consistency of financial rules.
9. Consideration could be given to reviewing campaign finance rules pertaining to third-parties, in view of ensuring transparency, integrity and accountability without unduly limiting their activities.

³²

In paragraph 24 of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Document, OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations.”

ANNEX: FINAL RESULTS

Contestants	Seats
Conservative	331
Labour	232
Scottish National Party	56
Liberal Democrat	8
Democratic Unionist Party	8
Sinn Fein	4
Plaid Cymru	3
Social Democratic and Labour Party	3
Ulster Unionist Party	2
UK Independence Party	1
Green Party	1
Independent/others	1
Total	650

In total, 191 women were elected to parliament, representing approximately 29 per cent.

ABOUT THE OSCE/ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) is the OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

The OSCE/ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 130 staff.

The OSCE/ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE Commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, the OSCE/ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. The OSCE/ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programs annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

The OSCE/ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights** and fundamental freedoms consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked persons, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance** and **non-discrimination**, the OSCE/ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. The OSCE/ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

The OSCE/ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website (www.osce.org/odihr).