

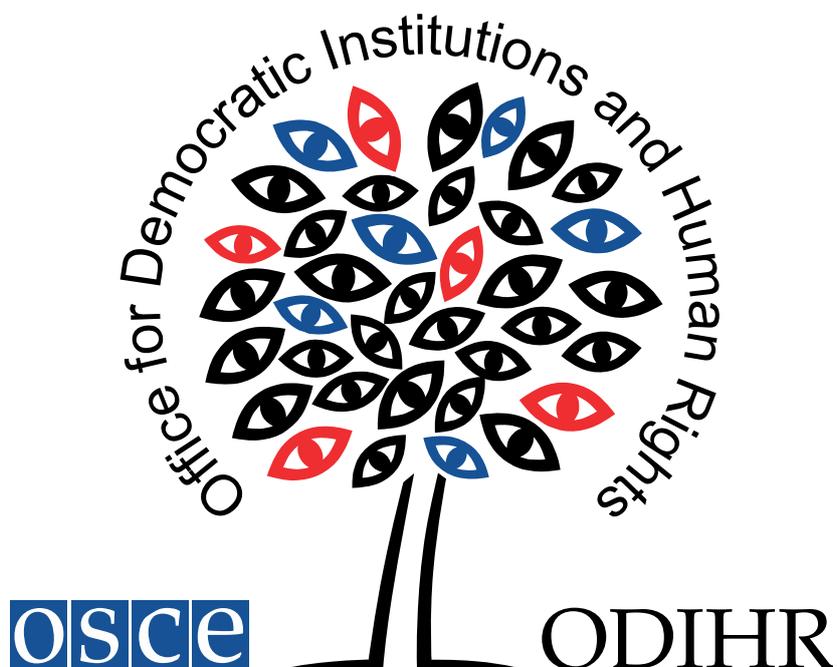


Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
22 OCTOBER 2017

OSCE/ODIHR Election Expert Team Final Report



Warsaw
20 December 2017

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following an invitation from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Slovenia to the OSCE and based on the findings and conclusions of a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM), deployed from 29 to 31 August, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed an Election Expert Team (EET) for the 22 October presidential election. The OSCE/ODIHR EET focused on the legal provisions pertaining to electoral participation of persons with disabilities, and political party and campaign finance.

The president is directly elected for a five-year term. The presidential election took place on 22 October, with the second round on 12 November. Nine candidates contested this election, including the incumbent who ran independently, but was endorsed by representatives of political parties in government. Although public interest in the presidential election was generally low, the campaign was considered a preparation for the 2018 parliamentary elections.

This election was conducted under a revised legal framework. Key changes to the electoral legislation pertaining to the presidential election included, among others, new provisions on electoral participation of persons with disabilities and new campaign finance regulations. Constitutional Court ruled in April 2014 that all polling stations should become accessible for persons with disabilities, which prompted legal amendments, but these will only take effect on 1 February 2018.

The election legislation specifically refers to the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life. The rights to vote and to stand as a candidate for persons with mental disabilities can be revoked through individualized court decisions. Despite the advanced legal framework and commendable efforts by the election administration, societal barriers and the lack of political will still hinder equal participation. All OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors, however, expressed a high level of confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

The legal framework for political party and campaign finance was revised in 2013 to take into account prior recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Key changes banned corporate donations, introduced mandatory detailed reporting and disclosure requirements, and increased monetary sanctions for failure to comply with political finance regulations. Most OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors expressed confidence in the new political finance legislation, seen as a step towards greater transparency.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following an invitation from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Slovenia to the OSCE and based on the findings and conclusions of a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM), deployed from 29 to 31 August, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)

¹ The English version of this report is the only official document. An unofficial translation is available in Slovenian.

deployed an Election Expert Team (EET) for the 22 October presidential election. The OSCE/ODIHR EET was composed of two experts from two OSCE participating States.

The OSCE/ODIHR EET focused on the legal provisions pertaining to electoral participation of persons with disabilities, and political party and campaign finance. Therefore, the report is limited in scope and does not offer an overall assessment of the electoral process. 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 2017 OSCE/ODIHR NAM report and previous ODIHR reports, which provide additional details on the electoral process in the Republic of Slovenia.²

The OSCE/ODIHR EET wishes to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Public Administration, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, and the State Election Commission for their co-operation and assistance, as well as to express gratitude to representatives of political parties and candidates, civil society and other interlocutors for their co-operation and assistance.

III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Slovenia is a parliamentary republic with legislative authority exercised by a 90-member National Assembly. Executive power is exercised primarily by the government, headed by a prime minister. The president is directly elected for a five-year term and may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms. To be elected, a candidate must receive more than 50 per cent of the valid votes cast. Otherwise, a runoff is held between the two candidates with the highest number of votes not later than 21 days after the first round. The candidate who receives more votes in the second round is elected.

The election took place on 22 October 2017, with the second round on 12 November. Eight out of nine candidates were running as candidates nominated by political parties, some of which were founded only recently. The incumbent Borut Pahor contested the election as an independent candidate, but was endorsed by the Social Democrats and the president of the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia.³ Although OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors opined that public interest in the presidential election was generally low, the campaign was considered a staging scene for the 2018 parliamentary elections. Following the result of the first round, Mr. Pahor and Mr. Marjan Šarec, who was nominated by his own list, continued to the 12 November runoff, with the incumbent eventually winning the election.

The OSCE/ODIHR has previously observed the 2011 early parliamentary elections. The Election Assessment Mission (EAM) deployed for those elections concluded that the legal framework provided a sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections, particularly ensuring the universality of the ballot through different means of voting. The EAM final report also noted that certain aspects of the legislation could benefit from further consideration. This included the need to improve mechanisms for transparency and accountability in the political finance system. The accessibility of polling stations and voting modalities for disabled voters were also mentioned as an issue, as was the

² See [previous OSCE/ODIHR reports on the Republic of Slovenia](#).

³ Other candidates were Suzana Lara Krause, Angelca Likovič, Maja Makovec Brenčič, Ljudmila Novak, Boris Popovič, Marjan Šarec, Andrej Šiško, and Romana Tomc. Five out of nine candidates were women.

lack of explicit legal provisions for election observation. Several legal amendments were since undertaken to address these recommendations.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The presidential election is primarily regulated by the Constitution, the National Assembly Elections Act (election law), the Election of the President of the Republic Act, the Elections and Referendum Campaign Act (ERCA), the Political Parties Act (PPA), and the Voting Rights Register Act. These are supplemented by the State Election Commission's (SEC) mandatory instructions for lower level election commissions.

This election was conducted under a revised legal framework.⁴ Key changes to the electoral legislation pertaining to the presidential election include, among others, new provisions on the electoral participation of persons with disabilities and new campaign finance regulations. In addition, in line with OSCE commitments and previous recommendations, the law now contains explicit provisions for election observation.⁵ While the SEC has not yet finalized rules of procedure for the accreditation of observers, the OSCE/ODIHR EET has received accreditation cards and had full access to the entire electoral process.

The Constitution enshrines universal and equal suffrage. Slovenia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and its Optional Protocol without reservations in 2008. Positively, the election legislation specifically refers to the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life.⁶

The rights to vote and to stand as a candidate for persons with mental disabilities can be revoked through individualized court decisions in conjunction with (but not necessarily tied to) the assessment of a person's business capacity and in the process of extending parental care by courts.⁷ Deprivation of the right to vote on the basis of mental disability is inconsistent with Articles 12 and 29 of the UN CRPD.⁸

A Constitutional Court Decision of 10 April 2014 regarding the electoral participation of persons with disabilities was reflected in the 2017 amendments to the election law. The decision found that the election law, foreseeing the designation of at least one accessible polling station per electoral district where voting may be facilitated by way of adapted ballot papers and voting machines, does not represent an adequate and sufficient adjustment to enable the right to vote for persons with disabilities. It further argued that the positive discrimination measure embedded in the disputed provision was unconstitutional as it interfered with the right of persons with disabilities to non-

⁴ The election law was amended on 28 April 2017, the ERCA was amended on 29 November 2013, and the Voting Rights Register Act was amended on 27 November 2013.

⁵ Paragraph 8 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document provides that the "participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place."

⁶ Slovenia has submitted its first report to the CRPD Committee in 2014 and will present the report in 2018, following several clarification questions from the committee. The rights of persons with disabilities are not guaranteed under a single umbrella act, but under sector-specific legislation. The [Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2014-2021](#) provides an overview of the relevant legal framework and institutional landscape.

⁷ The right to vote was withdrawn from a total of 1,935 citizens. A disabled persons' organisation (DPO) representative has argued that individualized court decisions might be arbitrary.

⁸ See the UNCRPD Communication No. 4/2011 and UNCRPD General Comment No.1 on Equal Recognition before the Law.

discriminatory treatment. The court decision also saw polling stations that are specifically arranged and equipped for the needs of persons with disabilities, if declared as polling stations for persons with disabilities only, as “a manifestly inadmissible segregation on the basis of a personal circumstance” and “a gross violation of an individual’s right to vote”.⁹

Subsequently, the 2017 amendments established that “polling stations must be accessible to persons with disabilities.” As a transitional provision, the amendments declared that the new standard would only become applicable on 1 February 2018 and thus did not apply to the 2017 presidential election. The SEC, whose subordinated bodies have meanwhile increased the number of accessible polling stations to 1,790 (56 per cent), explained to the OSCE/ODIHR EET that the implementation of this amendment will result in a reduced number of polling stations.¹⁰

The SEC has been consulting with disabled persons organizations (DPOs) regarding the accessibility of the electoral process, but consultations between these stakeholders have recently been stalling. Despite the advanced legal framework, societal barriers, such as insufficient understanding of specific needs of persons with disabilities during the whole electoral process, and lack of political will still hinder equal participation.

The target of making all polling stations accessible for persons with disabilities could require enhanced consultations and voter information ahead of parliamentary elections in 2018. This could be achieved through increased collaboration between the election administration, other relevant institutions, and DPOs.

The law envisages several alternative voting mechanisms. These include postal voting, early voting, homebound voting, and so-called “OMNIA” polling stations for voters casting their vote outside their electoral district.¹¹ For the first time for this election, the election law explicitly extended the possibility for postal voting to persons with disabilities.¹² The election law and the SEC instructions also foresee that a voter may be assisted in voting by a person of his/her own choice in case of a physical disability or illiteracy.

The OSCE/ODIHR has previously noted that current measures to enable the participation of voters with disabilities did not always facilitate the secrecy of the vote. This is particularly relevant to homebound voting.¹³ Alternative voting mechanisms are based on mutual trust between the election administration and the electorate and lack sufficient safeguards, as previously noted by the OSCE/ODIHR. According to international standards, alternative voting mechanisms should only be considered under special circumstances and not promoted as a substitute to improving accessibility at regular polling stations.¹⁴

⁹ See [Constitutional Court Decision \(Nr Up-861/11-25\)](#).

¹⁰ The determination of polling stations is left to the discretion of district election commissions. Premises of approximately two thirds of all polling stations are owned by municipalities, and of about 350 – by private persons. A SEC working group, to draft guidelines for district election commissions for the selection and adaptation of polling stations, will be established to prepare the implementation of the amendment ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections.

¹¹ During the first round of the 2017 presidential election, 28,264 voters have used the opportunity of early voting and 1,008 persons have voted from home. The SEC instructions also allow that “(i)f the polling station is not wheelchair-accessible, the voter may vote in front of the building in which the polling station is located.”

¹² Only 13 persons with disabilities have made use of the possibility to register for postal voting.

¹³ Arrangements for voting from home in case of illness can be made by phone as long as this requirement is announced to district election commissions at least three days prior to election day.

¹⁴ See the [2011 Thematic Study of the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Human Rights on Participation in Political and Public Life by Persons with Disabilities](#).

SEC should consider reviewing the safeguards for alternative voting mechanisms outside regular polling stations on election day, in particular for homebound voting.

Accessibility in the context of elections is not limited to physical accessibility, but extends to the access to polling stations as much as to voter information and campaign. Previously, the election law foresaw the use of voting machines for voters with visual impairments. The Constitutional Court decision provided the guidance that “the legislature will have to take into account the appropriate number” of voting machines. However, voting machines shall no longer be used.¹⁵ The SEC advised that this technology should no longer be used in polling stations on grounds of a disproportionate burden on the authorities, as the machines were little utilized and expensive.

Positively, the SEC has given commendable attention to e-accessibility and provided features on its website for voters with sensual impairments as well as a detailed list of physically easy-to-access polling stations on its website. In addition, all polling stations were equipped with large-print posters that contained symbols guiding voters on how to vote. Polling stations also provided tactile ballot guides for voters with visual impairments. A number of OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors opined that these tools worked well during a presidential election where the number of candidates was relatively small, but may not be sufficient during elections with a larger number of candidates.

SEC may give further consideration to the use of large-print and easy-to-read ballots, as well as the enhanced use of the Slovenian sign language, for the persons with sensory and mental disabilities during the entire electoral process.

V. PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The financing of political parties and election campaigns are subject to two different sets of rules contained in the PPA and the ERCA, respectively. The PPA was amended in 2014 to increase the transparency of political finance, and to take into consideration recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Group of States against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO).¹⁶ Key changes banned corporate donations, introduced mandatory detailed reporting and disclosure requirements, and increased monetary sanctions for failure to comply with political finance regulations. Most OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors expressed confidence in the new campaign and political finance legislation, seen as a step towards greater transparency.

A. FUNDING SOURCES

Funding of political parties may consist of membership fees, income from party property, cash and in-kind donations from physical persons, and loans taken out from banks and individuals. Cash donations are allowed up to EUR 420 and donations are capped at some EUR 16,000. Donations from legal entities or foreign sources are prohibited, whether to political parties or election campaigns.¹⁷

Political parties are also entitled to annual support from the state on the basis of votes received in the last parliamentary elections.¹⁸ Political parties are heavily reliant on public funding. In 2016, eligible

¹⁵ The law still mentions specifically adapted ballot papers, but according to the SEC they were never in use.

¹⁶ See [GRECO reports](#) on Transparency of Party Funding in Slovenia.

¹⁷ With certain exceptions as provided in ECRA and PPA.

¹⁸ Direct public funding is allocated annually to political parties that have received at least one per cent of the votes cast in the last parliamentary elections, allowing parties that do not hold a seat in parliament to receive public

political parties received a total of approximately EUR 4.3 million from the state.¹⁹ Some OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors stated that the complete ban on contributions from legal entities introduced in 2013 had reinforced the over-dependency of political parties on state funds.

Financing of election campaigns can come from political parties' funds, donations from physical persons and bank loans. While donations from individuals and candidates' own funds are capped at some EUR 16,000, political parties can contribute up to the applicable spending limit. Cash donations are allowed up to EUR 50.

The state reimburses presidential candidates' campaign expenditures in the amount of EUR 0.12 for each vote received if the candidate garnered at least 10 per cent of votes. This reimbursement, allotted after the elections, cannot exceed the actual expenses incurred by the candidate for electoral purposes. Some OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors expressed concerns regarding the high reimbursement threshold.

B. CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURE

Each candidate has to appoint an election campaign organizer, who can be a physical person or a legal entity, and who is responsible for ensuring that the campaign is conducted in accordance with regulations. The election campaign organizer must open a special bank account, no later than 45 days before election day, through which all funds have to be received and all electoral expenses incurred have to be paid.

The campaign spending limit is calculated on the basis of a defined allotment per registered voter in the country.²⁰ The spending limits for the first and the second rounds of election were approximately EUR 429,000 and EUR 686,000, respectively. The ERCA provides a definition of electoral expenses and specifies that all expenses relating to the election campaign, i.e. the period of 30 days to 24 hours before election day, are considered as election campaign expenses, and count against the spending limit, regardless of the date of the transaction or when the costs were incurred or paid.²¹ All campaign teams met by the OSCE/ODIHR EET expected their expenditure to be below the limit.

C. DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING

Both political parties and candidates' election campaign organizers must submit electronically their annual reports and campaign finance reports to the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services (AJPES). These reports have to include all forms of income, together with the identity of the donors having contributed more than an average monthly gross salary (some EUR 1,600). Reports must also contain all types of expenditures broken down in accordance with accounting regulations.

Election campaign organizers have to file the campaign finance reports within 15 days of the closing of the bank account, which can occur anytime within 4 months from election day. Therefore, the

funding. Of the annual public grant, 25 per cent is distributed among the eligible political parties in equal shares and 75 per cent in proportion to the number of votes the parties received.

¹⁹ According to the [Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services](#), the proportion of public funding in political parties' budgets in 2016 was around 87 per cent.

²⁰ A presidential candidate can spend up to EUR 0.25 per eligible voter in the country. In case of a second round, the spending limit may be increased by an additional EUR 0.15 per eligible voter in the country.

²¹ Such a definition does not include the cost related to the collection of signatures necessary for the candidate registration process.

deadline to submit the campaign finance report varies from one election campaign organizer to another. Political parties have to submit annual reports by 31 March.

The AJPES is obliged to make these reports public. Depending on the type of reports, different publication deadlines apply: within 15 working days from the deadline for the submission of political parties' annual reports and within 10 working days from the date of submission of the campaign finance reports. The AJPES has developed a standardized format for both types of reports, which is in line with international good practice.²² Some OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors expressed concerns regarding the accessibility of information. Indeed, while political finance data is easily accessible, its scope is limited since the reports, filed electronically, are not accompanied by supporting documents.

Consideration could be given to establishing a uniform deadline for the submission of campaign finance reports. In addition, in order to enhance political finance transparency, the law could be reviewed to require the submission of all supporting materials, together with the reports, and their further publication to allow for public scrutiny.

D. OVERSIGHT

The amended legislation clarified the role of institutions supervising different aspects of the political finance. The Internal Affairs Inspectorate is the main supervisory body in respect of implementation of the law, and the AJPES is tasked with the receipt and publication of political parties' annual reports and campaign finance reports.

The Court of Audit, which is the political finance oversight body, is vested with investigative powers and has the obligation to review and audit all annual reports of political parties and campaign finance reports of candidates that are eligible for the partial reimbursement of their electoral expenses. While auditing the reports, the Court of Audit can request the party or the election campaign organizer to submit justificatory documents. The Court of Audit can also request documents of other state or local community authorities, as well as of banks, and may request third persons to submit explanations, data or documents required for the audit. There is no campaign finance supervision during the campaign period carried out by the Court of Audit and no comprehensive audit of all campaign finance reports.²³

To ensure equal treatment of candidates and the uniform implementation of campaign finance regulations, all presidential campaign finance reports should be subject to the audit of the Court of Audit.

The Court of Audit has to pronounce on the accuracy and compliance of the campaign finance reports within six months of the closing of the bank account by the election campaign organizers. However, there is no such deadline with regard to the audit of the political parties' financial reports.

²² The Ministry of Interior's rules on the content and method of the [campaign finance reports](#) and [political parties' annual reports](#) – published in May and July 2014, respectively – were extensively used to develop the online templates, which are accessible on the AJPES website.

²³ Article 7.3 of the 2003 UN Convention against Corruption obliges states to “consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures... to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties”. Only 3 candidates, namely Borut Pahor, Marjan Šarec and Romana Tomc, managed to pass the 10 per cent reimbursement threshold. Thus, reports of only these three out of nine candidates will be reviewed by the Court of Audit.

Consideration could be given to setting a deadline for the Court of Audit to publish the findings of its audit of political parties' annual reports on an annual basis.

The 2013 amendments to the PPA and ERCA introduced new sanctions. Monetary sanctions are envisaged for various forms of political finance infringements. The scale of sanctions depends upon the nature of the perpetrator: political party, campaign organizer, individual or legal entity. Several OSCE/ODIHR EET interlocutors stressed that the lowering of some sanctions by the 2014 amendments to the PPA may have negatively impacted their deterrent effect.²⁴ Some interlocutors also expressed concerns regarding the enforcement mechanisms since the Court of Audit does not have any sanctioning powers.²⁵

Consideration could be given to reviewing the sanctioning system in order to ensure that all infringements of political finance rules entail effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations, as contained throughout the text, are offered with a view to further enhance the conduct of elections in the Republic of Slovenia and to support efforts to bring 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 OSCE/ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of Slovenia to further improve the electoral process and in following-up on the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.²⁶

A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The target of making all polling stations accessible for persons with disabilities could require enhanced consultations and voter information ahead of parliamentary elections in 2018. This could be achieved through increased collaboration between the election administration, other relevant institutions, and DPOs.
2. SEC should consider reviewing the safeguards for alternative voting mechanisms outside regular polling stations on election day, in particular for homebound voting.
3. Consideration could be given to setting a deadline for the Court of Audit to publish the findings of its audit of political parties' annual reports on an annual basis.
4. Consideration could be given to reviewing the sanctioning system in order to ensure that all infringements of political finance rules entail effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions.

²⁴ Article 16 of the Council of Europe's (CoE) Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2003)4 states that "States should require the infringement of rules concerning the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns to be subject to proportionate, effective and dissuasive sanctions".

²⁵ In case of political finance violations, the Court of Audit has to forward the alleged violations to the Ljubljana Local Court for sanctioning.

²⁶ In paragraph 25 of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Document, OSCE participating States committed themselves "to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations."

B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

5. SEC may give further consideration to the use of large print and easy-to-read ballots, as well as the enhanced use of the Slovenian sign language for the persons with sensory and mental disabilities during the entire electoral process.
6. Consideration could be given to establishing a uniform deadline for the submission of campaign finance reports. In addition, in order to enhance political finance transparency, the law could be reviewed to require the submission of all supporting materials, together with the reports, and their further publication to allow for public scrutiny.
7. To ensure equal treatment of candidates and the uniform implementation of campaign finance regulations, all presidential campaign finance reports should be subject to the audit of the Court of Audit.

ANNEX: ELECTION RESULTS²⁷

First Round

| Candidate | Political party | Number of votes | Percentage |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Suzana Lara Krause | Slovenian People's Party (SLS) | 5.885 | 0,78 |
| Angela (Angelca) Likovič | Voice for Children and Families | 4.418 | 0,59 |
| Maja Makovec Brenčič | Modern Centre Party (SMC) | 13.052 | 1,73 |
| Ljudmila Novak | New Slovenia Party (NSi) | 54.437 | 7,24 |
| Boris Popovič | Slovenia forever | 13.559 | 1,80 |
| Andrej Šiško | Unified Slovenia Movement | 16.636 | 2,21 |
| Marjan Šarec | Marjan Šarec List | 186.235 | 24,76 |
| Borut Pahor | Independent candidate | 355.117 | 47,21 |
| Romana Tomc | Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) | 102.925 | 13,68 |

Second Round

| Candidate | Political party | Number of votes | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Borut Pahor | Independent candidate | 378.307 | 53,09 |
| Marjan Šarec | Marjan Šarec List | 334.239 | 46,91 |

²⁷

According to final results published on the [SEC website](#).

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).