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RELEASED IN FULL

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ACTION EUR-01

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	INL-01	DODE-00
	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-01	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	L-00	MCO-01	MOFM-04	MOF-03
	M-00	AC-01	NRRC-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01	OPIC-01
	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00
	SSO-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	SA-01	IIP-00	SNIS-00	NISC-00
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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0243
INFO MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
CIS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 007677

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, RS
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS -- REASONABLY
FREE AND FAIR

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE TREAT ACCORDINGLY

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SUMMARY

1. (SBU) MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF ALL OF RUSSIA'S ELIGIBLE VOTERS CAST THEIR VOTES ON MARCH 26 FOR RUSSIA'S NEXT PRESIDENT. THIS COMPLETED THE FIRST EVER DEMOCRATIC TRANSFER OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER IN THIS COUNTRY. THE ELECTIONS, BY ALL ACCOUNTS, WERE CARRIED OUT WITHOUT INCIDENT, AND IN A MANNER GENERALLY CONSISTENT WITH RUSSIA'S ELECTION LAW AND WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES. THIS CONCLUSION IS BASED ON REPORTS FROM US MISSION OBSERVERS WHO VISITED POLLING PLACES IN 19 OF RUSSIA'S MOST POPULOUS REGIONS THROUGHOUT THE FEDERATION. IT IS

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CONSISTENT WITH THE OBSERVATIONS OF THE OSCE'S
INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION AND WITH THE
CONCLUSIONS OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS. END
SUMMARY

CAMPAIGN PRESSURES

2. (SBU) RUSSIA'S MARCH 26 ELECTIONS APPEAR TO HAVE
BEEN CARRIED OUT IN A MANNER CONSISTENT WITH ITS
ELECTION LAW, IN AN ENVIRONMENT GENERALLY FREE AND
FAIR. THIS CONCLUSION DOES NOT DISMISS REPORTS AND
OBSERVATIONS OF PROCEDURAL POLLING IRREGULARITIES OR
THE FAILURE OF THE INDEPENDENT AND STATE-CONTROLLED
MEDIA TO CONSISTENTLY PROVIDE EQUAL ACCESS TO AND
IMPARTIAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CANDIDATES TO THE

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PUBLIC. NEVERTHELESS, IRREGULARITIES OBSERVED WERE NOT
SIGNIFICANT AND WOULD LIKELY NOT HAVE AFFECTED THE
OUTCOME.

3. (SBU) THE LACK OF COMPLETE FAIRNESS OF BOTH STATE-
CONTROLLED AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA DURING THE CAMPAIGN,
WHILE A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN ITSELF, DID NOT REFLECT,
HOWEVER, A MEANINGFUL LACK OF DIVERSITY AND PLURALITY
OF VIEWS, OR A LACK OF CHOICE OF MEDIA SOURCES FOR THE
VOTERS. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE MEDIA GENERALLY REFLECTED
THE POPULAR VIEWS OF THE VOTING PUBLIC. AS A RESULT,
THE LACK OF COMPLETE FAIRNESS PROBABLY HAD NO
MEASURABLE AFFECT ON THE FINAL OUTCOME. THIS IS IN
CONTRAST WITH THE DUMA CAMPAIGN, DURING WHICH
FAVORITISM BY THE MEDIA (ESPECIALLY OF THE STATE-RUN OR
STATE-ALLIED MEDIA) APPEARS TO HAVE HAD A MUCH MORE
SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE ELECTION RESULTS.

4. (SBU) THOUGH MUTED IN COMPARISON TO THE CONTENTIOUS
1999 DUMA CAMPAIGNS, THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SEASON
HAD ITS OWN SHARE OF MEDIA BATTLES, SMEAR CAMPAIGNS,
AND REPORTS OF KREMLIN-INSPIRED MANEUVERING AND BACK
ROOM BARGAINING. BUT IT ALSO DIFFERED FROM THE DUMA
CAMPAIGN IN THAT IT WAS NOT MARKED BY SUBSEQUENT
DRAMATIC SWINGS IN POLLING PREFERENCES. ON THE
CONTRARY, THE CONSISTENCY OF POLLING PREFERENCES
FORECASTING A PUTIN VICTORY WORRIED CAMPAIGN ACTIVISTS
AND ELECTION OFFICIALS ALIKE BECAUSE OF THE PROSPECT
THAT FEWER THAN 50 PERCENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS (THE
MINIMUM NEEDED TO VALIDATE THE VOTE) WOULD TURN OUT.

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HOWEVER, DURING THE LAST WEEKS OF THE CAMPAIGN, MANY
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MAJOR POLLS CONSISTENTLY SHOWED THAT MORE THAN 50
PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE WOULD VOTE ON MARCH 26.

AWAITING THE FINAL TALLY - AND COMPLAINTS

5. (SBU) IT WILL TAKE SEVERAL DAYS TO DETERMINE
WHETHER THE VOTE COUNTS WERE ENTIRELY FREE OF ERROR OR
MANIPULATION AS THE BALLOTS MADE THEIR WAY FROM THE
BALLOT BOXES TO THE FINAL OFFICIAL VOTE TALLY SHEETS IN
MOSCOW. ACCORDING TO RUSSIAN CENTRAL ELECTION
COMMISSION (CEC) CHAIRMAN VESHNYAKOV, THE OFFICIAL VOTE
TALLY IS EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED BY APRIL 4,
AFTERWHICH THE RESULTS WOULD BE PUBLISHED. HE HAS
EXPLAINED, HOWEVER, THAT THE CEC MAY REQUIRE ADDITIONAL
TIME TO COMPLETE THE OFFICIAL TALLY, AS IT DID AFTER
THE DUMA ELECTIONS, AND THAT THE FINAL OFFICIAL RESULTS
MIGHT BE DELAYED UNTIL APRIL 8.

6. (SBU) THE PATH OF THE BALLOT FROM VOTE TO BALLOT
BOX DESCRIBED BY OBSERVER ACCOUNTS WAS WITHOUT MAJOR
OBSTACLE OR MANIPULATION. CEC CHAIRMAN VESHNYAKOV HAS
REPORTED THAT NO FORMAL COMPLAINTS HAVE YET BEEN FILED
REGARDING VIOLATIONS DURING THE COURSE OF THE
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. ON MARCH 28, THE PROCURACY

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GENERAL REPORTED THAT ITS OWN INVESTIGATION OF
COMPLAINTS FILED WITH REGIONAL PROCURACIES REVEALED NO
SERIOUS VIOLATIONS THAT COULD HAVE AFFECTED THE OUTCOME

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OF THE ELECTIONS. A PROCURACY SPOKESMAN CITED A TOTAL
OF FIVE CRIMINAL CASES AND 14 LESSER CASES HAVE BEEN
OPENED IN CONNECTION WITH ELECTION VIOLATIONS.

7. (SBU) ACCORDING TO OBSERVER REPORTS, COMMUNIST
PARTY OFFICIALS IN SEVERAL LOCALITIES COMPLAINED OF
VIOLATIONS RANGING FROM UNFAIR ACCESS TO THE MEDIA TO
BALLOT STUFFING. KPRF LEADER ZYUGANOV PUBLICLY CHARGED
THAT ELECTION VIOLATIONS WERE OBSERVED OR DISCOVERED IN
SEVERAL CONSTITUENCIES, THOUGH HE HAS YET TO FILE A
FORMAL COMPLAINT. INTERESTINGLY, WHILE KPRF OBSERVERS
WERE UBIQUITOUS DURING THE DUMA ELECTIONS, THIS WAS NOT
THE CASE ON MARCH 26. THEY WERE CONSISTENTLY PRESENT
AT POLLING PLACES WHERE THERE ALSO WERE OTHER
OBSERVERS, BUT OFTEN DID NOT STAY OR FAILED TO SHOW UP
AT PRECINCTS WHERE NO OTHER CANDIDATE REPRESENTATIVES
WERE PRESENT. THIS IS CURIOUS SINCE ZYUGANOV BEGAN
LEVELING CHARGES OF POSSIBLE FRAUD AT LEAST A WEEK
BEFORE THE ELECTION - A SIGN THAT SUCH ALLEGATIONS MAY
HAVE HAD MORE PROPAGANDA VALUE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

OBSERVER NOTES

8. (SBU) NEARLY 70 US MISSION OBSERVERS FROM EMBASSY
MOSCOW AND CONSULATES IN ST. PETERSBURG, YEKATERINBURG,
AND VLADIVOSTOK VISITED PRECINCTS IN 19 CONSTITUENCIES
THROUGHOUT THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO OBSERVE THE
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ON MARCH 26. THE CONCLUSION WE
REACHED IS THAT, WHILE NOT PERFECT, THE VOTING WAS

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REASONABLY FREE AND FAIR, WITH GENERALLY FEWER
PROCEDURAL IRREGULARITIES THAN DURING THE DECEMBER DUMA
ELECTIONS. WE BASE THAT ON CRITERIA SIMILAR TO THE
INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS USED BY OSCE --
NONDISCRIMINATORY REGISTRATION; EQUAL ACCESS TO POLLING
STATIONS; ACCESS TO CANDIDATE INFORMATION; SECRET
BALLOTING; ABSENCE OF INTIMIDATION; AND TRANSPARENT
VOTE COUNT.

9. (SBU) OUR OBSERVERS REPORTED THAT, FOR THE MOST
PART, POLLING SITES WERE ORDERLY AND COMPETENTLY
STAFFED, AND THE PROCESS AT EACH SITE WAS CARRIED OUT
IN A MORE PROFESSIONAL MANNER THAN IN DECEMBER. VOTERS
WITH IDENTIFICATION WERE ABLE TO VOTE, THOUGH SOME
VOTERS HAD TO PROVE THEIR RESIDENCY WHEN THEIR NAMES
DID NOT APPEAR ON THE REGISTRATION LISTS. THERE WERE
NO REPORTS BY OBSERVERS OF IMPEDIMENTS TO VOTER ACCESS
TO POLLING STATIONS.

10. (SBU) UNLIKE DURING THE DUMA ELECTIONS, THERE WERE
NO OBSERVER REPORTS OF CAMPAIGN ACTIVISTS ILLEGALLY
DISTRIBUTING OR POSTING LEAFLETS IN VIOLATION OF THE
ELECTION LAW. WHILE THERE WERE NUMEROUS REPORTS OF
"FAMILY VOTING" AND NON-OBSERVANCE OF SECRET BALLOTING,
IN ALL REPORTED CASES IT WAS BY PREFERENCE OF VOTERS
WHO WERE INDIFFERENT TO THE SECRECY, OR BECAUSE OF LACK
OF SUFFICIENT BOOTHS. POLLING STATION OFFICIALS,
QUERIED BY OBSERVERS ON THE LEGALITY OF "FAMILY
VOTING," BY AND LARGE MAINTAINED - INCORRECTLY - THAT
SUCH PRACTICES WERE NOT AGAINST THE LAW. THERE WERE NO
REPORTS OF INTIMIDATION, THOUGH, ACCORDING TO ONE
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REPORT, A CANDIDATE OBSERVER USED HIS ACCESS TO THE
POLLING SITE TO TRY TO PERSUADE VOTERS TO VOTE FOR HIS
CANDIDATE.

11. (SBU) VOTING GENERALLY PROCEEDED SMOOTHLY.
IRREGULARITIES WERE FEW. THOSE PROBLEMS THAT DID OCCUR
APPEARED TO BE MORE DUE TO A LACK OF ATTENTION TO
PROPER PROCEDURE OR CARELESSNESS THAN PREMEDITATED.
OBSERVERS REPORTED THAT VOTE COUNTING, WHILE SLOPPY IN
SOME AREAS, GENERALLY WAS TRANSPARENT AND ABSENT OF
FRAUDULENT INTENT.

COMMENT

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12. (SBU) OBSERVERS NOTED CONSISTENTLY THAT ELECTION PROCEDURES, COMING ONLY THREE MONTHS AFTER THE DUMA ELECTIONS, WERE CARRIED OUT MUCH MORE SMOOTHLY AND PROFESSIONALLY THAN IN DECEMBER. THE MOST VISIBLE PROBLEMS REPORTED ARE MORE ASSOCIATED WITH CULTURAL PECULIARITIES (I.E., "FAMILY VOTING") AND A LACK OF MATURITY OF DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES THAN WILLFUL INTENT TO COMMIT FRAUD. THE HIGH VOTER TURNOUT DEMONSTRATES THE CONFIDENCE RUSSIANS HAVE IN THE VOTE AS A MEANS TO MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD AND TO DETERMINE THE FATE OF THEIR

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COUNTRY. DESPITE OUR OWN VIEW THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE
CARRIED OUT IN A GENERALLY FREE AND FAIR MANNER,
RUSSIA'S "RULE OF LAW" INFRASTRUCTURE REMAINS WEAK AND
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OPEN TO ABUSE. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE TV MEDIA IS SUBJECT TO STATE AND OTHER PRESSURES TO INFLUENCE VOTERS CONTINUES TO PRESENT A PROBLEM IN RUSSIA'S DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT, ALTHOUGH THE CONTINUED WIDE ARRAY OF MEDIA SOURCES ACTS AS AN IMPORTANT COUNTERBALANCE.

13. (SBU) WHILE OBSERVER REPORTS ARE INSUFFICIENT TO CONCLUDE THAT THE VOTE TALLIES EVERYWHERE ARE WITHOUT ERROR, CONCRETE COMPLAINTS HAVE YET TO SURFACE. PARTY AND CANDIDATE OBSERVERS WERE PRESENT AT NEARLY ALL STATIONS WHERE EMBASSY OBSERVERS OVERSAW VOTE TABULATION PROCEDURES. NONE WERE REPORTED AS HAVING MADE ANY OBJECTIONS. IF THE DUMA ELECTIONS ARE ANY GUIDE, SUBSTANTIVE PROCEDURAL COMPLAINTS PROBABLY WILL BE MADE, AND MANY MAY HAVE MERIT. IN THE END, HOWEVER, IT APPEARS UNLIKELY SUCH COMPLAINTS WILL CHALLENGE THE END RESULTS.

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