

INTERIM REPORT
7 - 22 June 2023

26 June 2023

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On 8 May 2023, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev set the early presidential election for 9 July 2023, following a constitutional referendum that resulted in the revision of the two-thirds of the Constitution. The constitutional reform process was widely promoted as intending to enhance various rights and freedoms and the new Constitution improved some safeguards to ensure better respect of certain rights. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors, however, raised concerns about the freedom of assembly, association and expression as well as the lack of independence of the judiciary. The political landscape has remained unchanged, and none of the parliamentary political parties stand in open opposition to the president's policies and agenda.
- The president is directly elected from a single nationwide constituency, for a seven-year term. If no candidate obtains more than 50 per cent of the valid votes cast, a second round is held between the two candidates with the highest number of votes organized not earlier than 15 days, but not later than a month after the first round of election. A voter turnout requirement of 33 per cent of all registered voters applies to the first round.
- The legal framework is undergoing a reform with the Constitution and all election-related laws being revised. The 2023 amendments addressed some prior ODIHR recommendations, however, several long-standing recommendations are yet to be implemented, including those related to the exercise of fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and expression, citizen election observation and registration of political parties. According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), authorities intend to align election legislation with the constitutional norms following the 2023 election, and consider previous ODIHR recommendations as a part of this process.
- The election is administered by the CEC, 14 District Election Commissions (DECs), and 10,784 PECs. To date, the CEC has been conducting regular sessions, attended by media and international observers live streamed on-line, and updated several regulations which were published online. The CEC started a three-stage cascade training of more than 140,000 members of DECs and PECs. According to the CEC, 41.4 per cent of all DEC members and 52.1 per cent of PEC members are women.
- Recent constitutional changes lifted the blanket restriction on voting rights of persons serving a prison sentence for serious and grave crimes and those declared legally incapable. Their voting rights can now only be limited by a court decision. Voter registration is passive and based on permanent or temporary residence. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors, including DEC members, raised concerns over the accuracy of compilation of voter lists, as a large number of voters is usually added to the supplementary voter lists on election day. The ODIHR EOM long-term observers reported that door-to-door checks have been conducted to improve accuracy of the voter lists and to estimate the need for mobile voting.
- Citizens of at least 35 years of age, who have resided permanently in the country for at least 10 years prior to election day with a full command of the Uzbek language are eligible to stand as candidates. Only parties registered with the Ministry of Justice for at least four months prior to the announcement of the election have the right to nominate presidential candidates. The law requires collection of signatures of at least one per cent of voters in all 14 administrative units to be

registered. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns over genuine signature collection and verification process. The CEC registered four presidential candidates. One candidate is a woman.

- Reforms aimed at increasing women’s participation in public and political life have been underway since 2016 and the number of women in the parliament has increased to 48 of the 150 seats in the current parliament. However, women are generally underrepresented in political life and gender stereotypes persist. Only 2 out of 27 ministers in the government and 2 out of 12 members of the Supreme Judicial Council are women. All regional *hokims* are men.
- The election campaign period officially commenced on 7 June and will last until 7 July. To date, the campaign has been low-key, mirroring lack of opposition to the incumbent. The campaign tone has so far not been confrontational or negative. The presidential contestants and the political parties use posters, billboards and electronic screens and organize mainly small and medium-scale meetings with voters, both indoors and outdoors. All of the candidates are using social networks for campaign purposes. During pre-election events, the incumbent announced the intention to introduce various measures, which were soon legislated by presidential decrees to be implemented.
- All campaign expenses are covered from the state budget and allocated only to the political parties that nominated a candidate. For this election, the CEC allocated a total of UZS 19,655 billion for campaign purposes. The law requires interim and final campaign finance reporting. The Chamber of Accounts conducts only an *ex post* financial audit due at the beginning of the next calendar year.
- The right to freedom of expression and access to information, as guaranteed by international commitments, continues to be limited by the legislation. Defamation, insult and the dissemination of false information are criminalized with public defamation and insult of the president, including through online media and social networks, punishable with up to five years of imprisonment. According to some ODIHR EOM interlocutors, self-censorship remains pervasive, and some journalists and bloggers stated that they face interference into editorial autonomy, threats and arrests. State-owned national and regional broadcasters and newspapers are obliged to provide contestants with free-of-charge airtime and space. Candidates may also purchase advertising time and space under equal conditions. The ODIHR EOM commenced quantitative and qualitative monitoring of five TV stations and five online media outlets.
- The law grants broad legal standing to all stakeholders. As of 20 June 2023, the CEC publicly reported on 102 complaints and appeals, including related to the composition of election commissions. The CEC has set up a toll-free call centre to respond to election-related inquiries, complaints and to provide legal advice in a real-time format.
- Observers from international organizations, political parties, *mahalla* committees and media representatives are entitled to observe election. The legislation does not contain provisions for observation by citizen observers.

II. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the Central Election Commission (CEC), and based on the recommendation of the Needs Assessment Mission conducted on 17 and 18 May 2023, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 8 June.¹ The EOM, headed by Ambassador Urszula Gacek, consists of an 11-member core

¹ See previous ODIHR election [reports](#) on Uzbekistan.

team based in Tashkent and 24 long-term observers deployed throughout the country from 14 June. Mission members are drawn from 25 OSCE participating States and 46 per cent of mission members are women. Participating States have been requested to second 250 short-term observers to observe election day procedures.

III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Uzbekistan has a presidential system of government. The legislative powers are vested in the the parliament.² The president issues binding decrees and resolutions and appoints some of the members of the upper chamber of the parliament and also has a key role in the appointment of regional *hokims*, and other high-ranking officials and judges.

On 8 May 2023, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev set the early presidential election for 9 July 2023.³ The election is preceded by the 30 April 2023 constitutional referendum and a subsequent adoption of an amended Constitution.⁴ The constitutional reform process was widely promoted as intending to enhance various rights and freedoms. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors, however, raised concerns about the freedom of assembly, association and expression, as well as the lack of independence of the judiciary.

The political landscape remains largely unchanged. President Mirziyoyev, won the 2021 presidential election with an overwhelming majority of the votes. Following the 2019 parliamentary elections, all of the five registered parties are represented in the parliament. None of these parties have opposed the president's policies and agenda.⁵ The Ecological Party of Uzbekistan (EPU) was registered in 2019, no other party has been registered since 2003. On 16 April 2023, the Truth, Development and Unity Democratic Party notified the Ministry of Justice about their intention to formally establish a party.⁶ During the collection of signatures for registration, party representatives reported intimidation and their leader was detained.⁷ On 15 June, the Ministry of Justice denied registration to the party announcing that it received 10,777 signatures out of which only 1,439 were recognized as valid.

Reforms aimed at increasing women's participation in public and political life have been underway since 2016 and the number of women in the parliament has increased to 48 of the 150 seats in the current parliament (32 per cent). On 6 April 2023, the Senate confirmed amendments, which extended the scope of legal protection for victims of sexual abuse. However, women are generally underrepresented in political life and gender stereotypes persist.⁸ Only 2 out of 27 ministers in the government and 2 out of 12 members of the Supreme Judicial Council are women. All regional *hokims* are men.

² The *Oliy Majlis* can call referenda, adopts the budget, and following the 2019 constitutional amendments, its legislative chamber is responsible for electing the prime minister upon nomination by the president.

³ According to the previous Constitution, the current term of the incumbent president ends in 2026. However, President Mirziyoyev called for an early presidential election, citing that the new Constitution is reforming and rebalancing all branches of power, which brings with it new social, political and economic challenges.

⁴ Constitutional amendments were voted on as a single package. According to the CEC, the voter turnout was 84.5 per cent with 90.2 per cent of the voters being in favour of the proposed changes. The Constitution, *inter alia*, establishes a secular and social state, extends the presidential mandate from five to seven years and resets the term limit of the incumbent. The Constitution limits a president to two consecutive terms in office.

⁵ Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU) won 53 seats, Democratic Party of Uzbekistan - *Milliy Tiklanish* (DPU) 36 seats, Social Democratic Party of Uzbekistan Adolat (SDPU) – 24 seats, People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU) – 22 seats, and Ecological Party (EPU) – 15 seats.

⁶ According to the representatives of the party, 12,000 out of 20,000 required signatures were submitted to the Ministry of Justice, with the plan to submit additional signatures by July 2023.

⁷ According to media reports, on 7 June 2023, the leader of the party, Khidirnazar Allakulov, was detained and later on the same day released. The Department of Internal Affairs of Fergana released a statement that Mr. Allakulov injured two police officers and the Prosecutor's Office is currently investigating the case.

⁸ The UNDP study on Negative Impact of Gender Stereotypes and Patriarchal Attitudes on Gender Equality underscored that women's participation in the parliament improved by reaching 32 and 25 per cent of the seats in the Legislative Chamber and the Senate, respectively, however, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in

IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The president is directly elected from a single nationwide constituency. If no candidate obtains more than 50 per cent of the valid votes cast, a second round is held between the two candidates with the highest number of votes organized not earlier than 15 days, but not later than a month after the first round of election. A voter turnout requirement of 33 per cent of all registered voters applies to the first round.

Uzbekistan is a party to the main international instruments related to holding of democratic elections.⁹ The presidential election is primarily regulated by the 2023 Constitution, and the 2019 Election Code.¹⁰ Following the adoption of the changes to the Constitution, the legal framework has been undergoing a reform process that included revision of the Constitution and the election Code. The 2023 changes included introduction of a two-month deadline for holding early presidential election in case the president calls them.¹¹ The 2023 amendments to the Constitution and the Election Code addressed some of the ODIHR's previous recommendations, including removing a blanket ban for people declared legally incapable by court and those imprisoned for serious and grave crimes, and amendments to the Election Code further expanded the ineligibility criteria for members of election commissions.¹² According to the CEC, the 2023 amendments to the Election Code reflect amendments to the Constitution and thus did not require additional consultation with relevant stakeholders prior to their adoption.

Several long-standing ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including those related to regulation and exercise of fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and expression, citizen election observation and registration of political parties. Furthermore, some ambiguities and gaps remain in the legislation.¹³ According to the CEC, a major legal reform to revise electoral legislation is planned following this election, and in that process, they plan to consider previous ODIHR recommendations.

The 2023 Constitution includes basic guarantees for fundamental human rights and freedoms, including the right to freedoms of opinion and expression, assembly, association, and suffrage rights.¹⁴ While the Constitution stipulates the direct application of human rights, they still continue to be restricted by subordinate legislation which has not been revised yet.¹⁵ Some safeguards to ensure better respect of

the executive power (3.4 per cent), as well as in the managerial positions (27 per cent) and in the entrepreneurship (25 per cent).

⁹ Including the [1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), [1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), [1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), [2003 Convention against Corruption](#), [2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), and [the 2002 Convention on the Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms in the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States \(the CIS Convention\)](#).

¹⁰ It is further supplemented by the 1996 Law on Political Parties (LPP), the 2004 Law on Financing of Political Parties (LFPP), the 1994 Criminal Code and the 1994 Code of Administrative Responsibilities as well as presidential decrees and resolutions and binding regulations issued by the CEC.

¹¹ Other changes related to the early parliamentary elections, powers of the CEC to determine the dates for the preparation and organization of the repeat elections, among others.

¹² Several other changes were introduced in 2021, and these partially addressed some prior ODIHR recommendations, including relaxation of procedures for organizing campaign events, the prohibition of the misuse of state resources, and some related to campaign finance and election dispute resolution.

¹³ The law does not detail, *inter alia*, some procedures for candidate nomination and registration, conditions for campaigning, procedures for withdrawal of candidates, and coalitions of political parties.

¹⁴ The Constitution stipulates direct application of its norms, primacy of international treaties to which Uzbekistan is a party over the national laws.

¹⁵ See [2020 UN Human Rights Committee Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan](#) which expressed concerns 'about undue restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly in law and in practice'.

human rights, including grounds for limitation that shall be provided by law were enhanced. Prior ODIHR recommendation related to regulation of certain aspects of public gatherings for campaign purposes was partially addressed by the 2021 amendments to the Election Code abolishing the authorization procedure of campaign events in favour of a simple notification requirement. However, freedom of assembly is not regulated by any specific law and the provision in the Constitution on freedom of assembly was not amended.

V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The presidential election is administered by the CEC, 14 District Election Commissions (DECs), and 10,784 PECs, including 56 PECs established abroad.¹⁶

The CEC is a permanent body; its members are appointed by the *Oliy Majlis* for an indefinite term, based on proposals from regional representative bodies.¹⁷ The current CEC has 21 members, including seven women. The CEC is mandated with the organization and conduct of the elections, and it is vested with broad statutory powers.¹⁸ For early elections, this includes discretion over the electoral deadlines.¹⁹ The CEC has been conducting regular sessions, attended by media and international observers, and streamed online. For the first time, the CEC sessions include reporting and discussions on complaints and communications received, including by the lower-level election administration.²⁰ Thus far, the CEC adopted and updated several regulations.²¹

On 19 May, the CEC formed DECs on the basis of proposals from regional assemblies. By the 29 May deadline, PECs were formed based on proposals from the local councils, which receive nominations from *mahalla* committees, public associations and other organizations.²² The 2023 amendments to the Election Code and the CEC regulation include some criteria for nomination of commissioners.²³ According to the CEC, as a result, several members of DECs who are currently senators, will no longer be engaged as DEC members. The CEC has so far received several complaints and communications from citizens related to the composition of election commissions, including dissatisfaction with the appointment of the chairperson or members of PECs. There is limited public information on the selection process. According to the CEC, about 86 percent of DEC members have previous experience.

The CEC developed a three-stage cascade training for members of election commissions at all levels, and started with training of more than 140,000 members of DECs and PECs. The training sessions observed by ODIHR EOM long-term observers, thus far, were overall informative and interactive. Most of the materials visible in the regions focused on promotion of participation in election. Overall, women are well represented in the election administration. According to the CEC, 41.4 per cent of all DEC

¹⁶ Special polling stations are established in penitentiary institutions, military units, hospitals and other health institutions.

¹⁷ According to the recent constitutional amendments, the CEC chairperson is elected for five years by the CEC from among its members and can hold this position for no more than two consecutive terms.

¹⁸ These powers include registration of candidates, ensuring equal campaign opportunities, including in the media, the distribution of the ballots, validating and invalidating election results.

¹⁹ The CEC published a detailed calendar plan two days after the call for the early election.

²⁰ DECs are connected to the CEC sessions via Zoom.

²¹ Including related to criteria for DEC and PEC membership, voter identification with the use of biometric devices in fifty polling stations in Tashkent, organization of the work of DECs, election day procedures, the rights of observers, and the use of video cameras on election day.

²² DECs and PECs are temporary election administration bodies.

²³ Deputies of the Legislative Chamber and local *Kengashes* as well as members of the Senate, deputies of *hokims*, representatives of political parties, the candidates as well as persons whose conviction for grave or particularly grave crimes has not been cancelled or expired are no longer eligible to be members of DECs and PECs. The previous applicable requirements include that one organization may not nominate more than a half of the PEC members for a specific PEC. Political parties are not entitled to nominate members to any commission.

members and 52.1 per cent of PEC members are women. The legislation provides for several alternative voting methods, including early voting.²⁴

VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens who are 18 years of age or older have the right to vote. Recent constitutional changes lifted the blanket restriction on voting rights of persons serving a prison sentence for serious and grave crimes and those declared legally incapable. Their voting rights can now only be limited by a court decision. Following adoption of the Constitution, these groups of citizens were automatically enfranchised.²⁵

Voter registration is passive, and is based on permanent or temporary residence.²⁶ The Single Electronic Voter Register (SEVR) is compiled automatically on the basis of inputs integrated from databases of several ministries and agencies.²⁷ Preliminary voter lists are compiled in the SEVR for each polling station.²⁸ PECs are responsible for verification of the voter lists and have been collecting the data from local bodies and *mahallas*, including through door-to-door visits to verify the factual addresses of the voters. The total number of voters as of 21 June, reported by the CEC, was some 22 million.

Citizens are given the opportunity to verify their voter registration data online as well as in-person at polling stations. While voter lists are finalized five days prior to election day, the election law still foresees the possibility for the inclusion of voters in supplementary lists on election day. Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors, including DEC members, raised concerns over the accuracy of compilation of voter lists, as a large number of voters is usually added through supplementary voter lists on election day. The ODIHR EOM long-term observers reported that door-to-door checks have been conducted to improve accuracy of the voter lists and to estimate the need for mobile voting.

VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Citizens of at least 35 years of age, who have resided permanently in the country for at least 10 years prior to election day and have full command of the Uzbek language are eligible to stand as candidates.²⁹ Individuals convicted of intentional crimes, those declared incapable by a court, and professional servants of religious organizations are not eligible to stand. Only parties registered with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for at least four months prior to the announcement of the election have the right to nominate presidential candidates. The legislation on registration of political parties, previously assessed by ODIHR as burdensome and open to arbitrary application, remains unchanged.³⁰ The legislation does not permit individual candidates to stand for elections.

On 15 May, the CEC confirmed the eligibility of all five registered political parties to nominate candidates. The law requires collection of signatures of at least one per cent of voters in all 14

²⁴ According to the law, early voting will take place between 28 June and 5 July.

²⁵ According to the CEC, there were 10,702 disenfranchised prisoners and 6,608 persons with mental and psychological disabilities.

²⁶ Registration for out-of-country voting is active. According to official information, approximately two million citizens currently live abroad.

²⁷ A number of government agencies, including the Ministry of Justice's Agency for Personalization, the Ministries of Interior, Defense, and Foreign Affairs.

²⁸ The PECs received access to the voter lists in their respective precincts on 1 June. Lists of eligible voters at penitentiary institutions, military units, hospitals and other health institutions are compiled by the heads of these institutions.

²⁹ There is no regulation on how to assess the language requirement, and the CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that it is not done in practice unless there are doubts in the language command of candidates.

³⁰ In particular, signing up of the 20,000 members that is necessary for the party registration process.

administrative units to be registered. These had to be collected between 15 May and 3 June.³¹ Four political parties submitted nominations to the CEC. The incumbent was initially nominated by two political parties and subsequently registered as a candidate of the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU).³² The CEC regulation provides that at least 15 percent of signatures collected for each candidate should be verified without further specifying the means of selecting the sample.³³ Some ODIHR EOM interlocutors raised concerns over genuine signature collection and verification process. All four candidates were registered on 6 June.³⁴ One candidate is a woman.

VIII. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

The election campaign period officially is set from 7 June and to 7 July. Campaigning and publication of opinion polls, including online, on the day and the day prior to the election, is prohibited by law. The legal framework contains regulations aimed at ensuring equal campaign opportunities for all candidates, including for organizing gatherings, access to media and the publication and distribution of campaign materials.³⁵ Political parties and candidates are required to inform DEC and PEC and notify in written to the respective district *hokimiyat* about the place and time of public meetings with voters, at least three days in advance.

To date, the campaign has been low-key, mirroring lack of opposition to the incumbent. The campaign tone has so far not been confrontational or negative. The presidential contestants and the political parties use posters, billboards and electronic screens and organize mainly small and some medium-sized meetings with voters, both indoors and outdoors.³⁶ The campaign events observed by ODIHR EOM so far, primarily focused on issues relating to the economy, healthcare, education, rule of law and improvement in the legislation as well as water management and environment. During pre-election events, the incumbent announced the intention to introduce various social measures, which were soon legislated by presidential decrees to be implemented.³⁷ All of the candidates are using *Telegram* for campaign purposes, while *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Twitter* and *Instagram* are the other preferred social media platforms for campaigning employed by most of the contestants.

IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance is regulated by the Election Code and the 2004 Law on Financing of Political Parties (LFPP), and by the CEC regulations that determine the total amount of the allocated funds, reporting deadlines and templates. While the law allows funding from alternative sources for the statutory

³¹ For this election, collection of at least 221,183 signatures was required. According to the Election Code, no more than 8 per cent may be collected in one of the country's 14 administrative units. Voters can sign for more than one candidate.

³² The Democratic Party of Uzbekistan was initially nominating and collecting signatures for the incumbent president.

³³ The CEC established two expert groups composed of 18 members each, and allocated four days for verification of documents and supporting signatures that amounted to a minimum of 120 000 signatures (at least 30 000 signatures for each of four nominees).

³⁴ Four presidential candidates are: Adbushukur Khamzaev– nominated by Ecological Party (EPU), Shavkat Mirziyoyev – nominated by Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU), Ulugbek Inoyatov – nominated by People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU) and Robakhon Makhmudova – nominated by Social Democratic Party of Uzbekistan Adolat (SDPU).

³⁵ For the purpose of meeting voters, registered contestants are entitled to receive free of charge venues, including equipped rooms, from state management bodies, local government authorities, and public associations.

³⁶ All of the 11 campaign events observed by ODIHR EOM so far were held in Uzbek language and only in one out of 11 main speakers was a woman. ODIHR EOM observers did not note the presence of persons with disabilities in the events, although the majority of the venues were allowing access.

³⁷ On 1 June, President established National Social Protection Agency to enhance the citizen's social protection and improve the quality of the social services; on 12 June President approved amendments to the legislation for tax reductions in Karakalpakstan; and on 14 of June, presidential decree cleared property tax and land tax debts, and terminated legal proceeding relating to the collection of tax debts, penalties and fines.

activities of political parties, it is prohibited to use these sources for election campaigns.³⁸ The funding for campaign purposes is allocated additionally, and only to the political parties that nominated a candidate.³⁹ For this election, the CEC allocated a total of UZS 19,655 billion for campaign purposes.⁴⁰

As of 2021, the legislation requires interim and final reporting by political parties, nominating candidates to the CEC based on the CEC's approved template.⁴¹ These have to be reported separately from the rest of the public funding.⁴² Expenditures on campaigning online and on social media must be also included in the interim report. The Chamber of Accounts conducts a financial audit due only at the beginning of the next calendar year. In line with a previous ODIHR recommendation, as of 2021, the results of the audit must be published. The Code of Administrative Responsibilities only provides general responsibility for failure to comply with the procedure on campaign finance punishable by a fine but does not list specific types of violations covered by this administrative offence.⁴³

X. MEDIA

The Constitution provides a basic guarantee of freedom of expression and access to information. Defamation, insult and the dissemination of false information are criminalized.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the 2021 amendments to the Law on Informatization expanded the scope of responsibility of bloggers and owners of websites and instant messaging systems for third-party content and the veracity of the information hosted on their platforms. According to some ODIHR EOM interlocutors, self-censorship remains pervasive, and some journalists and bloggers stated that they face interference into editorial autonomy, threats and arrests.

A large number of state-funded media outlets compete with commercial media in a limited advertising market. The National Television and Radio Company (NTRC) which operates 12 TV stations with nationwide coverage, as well as 14 regional broadcasters, and 4 radio stations, has yet to be transformed into a public service media.⁴⁵ Information on the ownership of commercial media is not publicly accessible. While television focuses on entertainment and the promotion of social and business development, the slight opening of the online space in recent years created room for some criticism of local government and discussion on social issues. The Mass Media Law prohibits a foreign share of over 30 per cent in a mass media outlet and local mass media are prohibited from receiving foreign funding. The Radio Free Europe's Uzbek language service (*Radio Ozodlik*) website remains blocked, as well as a number of other websites.⁴⁶

³⁸ All expenses related to the presidential election campaigns shall be exclusively financed from the state budget.

³⁹ Political parties are allowed to use their own funds for the preparation of campaign materials prior to the start of the campaign which shall later be reimbursed from the funds provided by the state for campaign purposes.

⁴⁰ EUR 1 equals 12,383.7 UZS. Unused campaign funds have to be returned to the state budget within five days after publishing the results by election commissions.

⁴¹ The interim report is due five days prior to election day and final report shall be submitted within 20 days after the announcement of the election results.

⁴² Reports shall be published on the websites of the political parties and in print media.

⁴³ Fines for citizens are up to 10 base units, and for public officials – up to 20. Base unit for 2023 is set 330,000 UZS.

⁴⁴ While imprisonment for defamation was removed from the Criminal Code in 2020, public defamation and insult of the president remains punishable with up to five years of imprisonment and 2021 amendment introduced a provision on defamation and insult of the president committed through telecommunication networks and internet, including online media and social networks.

⁴⁵ The general director of the NTRC is appointed by the government in consultation with the president.

⁴⁶ Lists of blocked websites with full details regarding the necessity and justification for blocking are not publicly accessible.

The Election Code and a CEC decision entitle contestants for free-of-charge airtime and space on state-owned national and regional broadcasters and in newspapers.⁴⁷ In addition, candidates may purchase advertising time and space under equal conditions. Media have to provide equal coverage in news. According to the CEC decision, provisions are monitored by the media regulator, the Agency for Information and Mass Communication (AIMC), in co-operation with the press office of the CEC. On 12 June, ODIHR EOM started a quantitative and qualitative monitoring of five TV stations and five online media outlets.⁴⁸

XI. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

The Constitution stipulates that Uzbekistan is a multi-ethnic country where all citizens have equal rights without discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity and language. The majority of population is ethnic Uzbek and according to official data, minorities comprise 16.3 per cent of the population. Some of the other sizeable ethnic groups include Tajiks, Kazakhs, Russians, Karakalpaks, Tatars, and Turkmens, among others.⁴⁹ Uzbek is the official state language and, by law, the state has to create the necessary conditions for the development of other minority languages. The Election Code provides that ballots shall be printed in the official language (both in Latin and Cyrillic alphabets) as well as in the languages spoken by the majority of the population of the respective district upon a DEC decision. Political parties informed ODIHR EOM that they also printed and disseminated campaign materials in minority languages.

XII. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The law grants broad legal standing to all stakeholders.⁵⁰ Election administration has the jurisdiction over any election related complaints, except for those against the actions and decisions of election commissions that shall be exclusively filed with administrative courts.⁵¹ While the Election Code does not explicitly provide for challenging of inactions of election administration in court, the Law on Consideration of Appeals of Persons and Legal Entities (LCAPLE) as well as CEC resolution provide for the right to challenge unlawful refusal to accept and process appeals. Decisions of the CEC, including on the election results, can be challenged to the Supreme Court.

While the law does not define complaint submission deadlines, election commissions are obliged to decide on complaints within three days from submission.⁵² According to the information on appeals available on the CEC website, the three-day deadline was not always observed by the CEC. The CEC informed ODIHR EOM that in some cases they are guided by the deadlines set by the LCAPLE with a possibility for the deadline to be extended. Decisions of election administration may be challenged in court within five days after the adoption and shall be decided within three days.

⁴⁷ For the first week of the campaign, the four candidates are allocated 90 min free airtime on 4 national state TV stations respectively, while for the weeks two to five they receive 30 min respectively. In the final week a cross-party debate is scheduled. On regional state TV the total amount of free airtime is 100 min per station and candidate.

⁴⁸ The monitored TV stations include the state owned *O'zbekiston* and *O'zbekiston24* and the commercial *MY5*, *Sevimli*, and *UzReport*. Monitored online media outlets are *Daryo.uz*, *Gazeta.uz*, *Kun.uz*, *Podrobno.uz* and *Qalampir.uz*.

⁴⁹ The last official census was conducted in 1989 and the information about ethnic minorities was updated by the State Statistics Committee in 2017. A new census is scheduled to take place in 2023.

⁵⁰ Any person or legal entity can file an appeal with election commissions. Mistakes or inaccuracies in voter lists may be raised by any citizen. Decisions of the election commissions may be challenged in court by political parties that nominated a candidate, candidates themselves, candidate's proxies, observers and voters.

⁵¹ Election-related judicial decisions are examined by a single judge under an expedited procedure and are subject to immediate enforcement. In line with a prior ODIHR recommendation, the 2021 amendments eliminated parallel avenues for election-related disputes abolishing the previous dual system of submitting appeals in parallel to courts and higher-level election commissions.

⁵² Exceptions include all complaints submitted within six days prior to as well as on election day, which shall be decided immediately.

The law requires election commissions to maintain a complaint log and to inform applicants about the decisions. Publication of individual decisions on complaints is not required by the law.⁵³ Since June 2023, the CEC has started reporting on the appeals received; and adopting resolutions on approving the measures taken in response to the appeals.⁵⁴ However, the process of consideration of complaints and appeals, as well as response to applicants, take place before the sessions. While complaints submitted to the courts require a public hearing with the presence of the parties concerned, interested parties may be invited to the election commissions.⁵⁵ Since 10 May 2023, the CEC reported about 102 applications from citizens. Of these, 22 were related to formation of PECs, and issues with membership of the PECs.

The CEC set up a toll-free call-centre to respond to election-related inquiries, complaints and provide legal counselling in a real-time format. It is operated by 10 invited legal experts and is operational from 10 June to the day of the official announcement of the election results.⁵⁶ The CEC legal department controls and monitors its work.⁵⁷ As of 20 June, they received 72 calls.

XIII. CITIZEN AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS

Observers from international organizations, political parties, mahalla committees and media representatives are entitled to observe elections. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, the legislation does not contain provisions for observation by citizen observers. International observers are accredited by the CEC, while others are subject to accreditation at the DEC. Thus far, the CEC has registered 308 international observers. Some ODIHR NAM interlocutors highlighted procedures for registering civil society organization and restrictions on foreign funding as the main obstacles for the growth of civil society and their full participation in election processes.

XIV. ODIHR EOM ACTIVITIES

The ODIHR EOM commenced its work on 8 June. The Head of the ODIHR EOM met with the CEC Chairperson, the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Supreme Court, the Deputy General Prosecutor, State Inspection on Control in the Field of Information and Telecommunications of the Republic of Uzbekistan (*Uzkamnozorot*), candidates, political party leaders and representatives, media, and members of the diplomatic and international community. The ODIHR EOM and the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan operate separately, under their respective mandates.

***The English version of this report is the only official document.
An unofficial translation is available in Uzbek and Russian languages.***

⁵³ LCAPLE requires only to publish quarterly overview of the statistics on received complaints and appeals.

⁵⁴ ODIHR EOM reviewed 64 appeals published by the CEC for the period from 19 May to 13 June 2023.

⁵⁵ The interested parties may be invited.

⁵⁶ Experts represent the Supreme Court, the General Prosecutor's Office, the National Guard, the Ministries of Justice, Internal Affairs, Digital Technologies, the Academy of Public Administration and other official state bodies and organizations.

⁵⁷ According to the CEC resolution 1278, operators are not required to register appeals resolved on the spot, to respond to them in written or electronic form. If it is not possible to resolve appeals on the spot, they should be registered within 10 minutes from the time of receipt. Responsible operator prepares daily analytical and statistical data on all appeals received by the "call-centre" and provides it to the CEC Secretariat's legal support unit.