

# News from Copenhagen

## OSCE PA leads election observation in Ukraine, visits Donetsk on eve of election

Former OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Joao Soares (MP, Portugal) and PA Vice-President Ilkka Kanerva (MP, Finland) led OSCE observers to the 25 May presidential election in Ukraine.

Soares, appointed by OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Didier Burkhalter as Special Co-ordinator of the observation mission, led more than 1,000 short-term observers while Kanerva served as the head of more than 100 OSCE parliamentary observers who were deployed throughout the country. OSCE PA teams were in Kyiv and surrounding areas, as well as Lviv, Odessa, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Poltava.

“This election proved the democratic spirit of the people of Ukraine, who had the opportunity to genuinely express their will at the ballot box, and seized it in high numbers,” said Soares at the post-election press conference on 26 May. “The electoral and security authorities of Ukraine should be commended for their efforts – under extraordinary circumstances – to facilitate an election that largely upheld democratic commitments.”

OSCE PA Special Representative Ambassador Andreas Nothelle supported the PA’s ten-member team in Lviv, which included Vice-Presidents Doris Barnett (MP, Germany) and Isabel Pozuelo (MP, Spain). PA staffer Francesco Pagani supported the ten-member team in Kharkiv, while Director of Presidential Administration Roberto Montella facilitated the work of the 12-member team in Odessa.

In addition, Soares led a team to Donetsk including Vice-Presidents Kanerva and George Tsereteli (MP, Georgia), as well as Canadian MP Chrystia Freeland, on the eve of the election. “In an election as significant as Sunday’s vote, it is essential that the whole country feels that it can freely take part,” Soares said following the visit. “This is why we felt compelled to go to Donetsk in spite of the situation there, to support both election officials working to ensure a fair election and voters seeking to express their voices at the ballot box.”

“It was obvious to me,” he continued, “that the majority of the citizens, ordinary people, community leaders and businessmen – and even oligarchs – came together to save their country and were willing to take serious risks in order to ensure that the vote could take place.”



Joao Soares and Ilkka Kanerva at the post-election press conference.

Kanerva added, “By simply being in Donetsk, we sent an important message both to those seeking to derail the process and to the voting public: the right to vote is sacrosanct, and the people of Ukraine can count on the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly to support them in their democratic aspirations, and to rebuke those who would challenge Ukraine’s unity and progress.”

“Based on our meetings, it was clear that under extremely difficult circumstances in Donetsk, election administrators were doing their best to uphold the rights of citizens to participate,” said Tsereteli. “Unfortunately, due to the obstruction of separatists, no polling stations were open in Donetsk city on 25 May.”

OSCE PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver and Operations Officer Iryna Sabashuk accompanied the delegation to Donetsk city, which turned out to be the most difficult area for the election.

Oliver also attended the opening of a polling station in Kyiv along with Vice-President Kanerva, National Democratic Institute (NDI) Chair and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and NDI President Kenneth Wollack. Later in the day, Oliver joined the team in Dnipropetrovsk and met with oblast governor Ihor Kolomoyskyi.

All teams reported positively on election day procedures and the work of the more than 100 parliamentarians deployed in the country. The day after the election, Soares delivered the joint preliminary statement of the OSCE PA, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, NATO PA, European Parliament and the OSCE/ODIHR. The observers concluded that the election was characterized by high turnout and a clear resolve by the authorities to hold what was a genuine election largely in line with international commitments that respected fundamental freedoms, despite the hostile security environment in two eastern regions of the country.

PA Director of Elections Andreas Baker and Operations Officer Iryna Sabashuk were responsible for the overall organization of the mission and the observer teams in the Kyiv region. Communications Director Richard Solash handled press relations and chaired the post-election press conference.



OSCE PA delegation meeting with OSCE/ODIHR long-term observer Wolfgang Sporrer in Donetsk, 24 May 2014.