

# News from Copenhagen

## US elections competitive, but voting rights not guaranteed for all, observers say

The 6 November elections in the United States were highly competitive and contestants could campaign freely, with media presenting a wide array of information, enabling voters to make an informed choice. However, campaign rhetoric was often intensely negative and at times intolerant, including on social networks, observers from the OSCE PA and ODIHR concluded in a statement released Wednesday.

The fundamental right to suffrage was undermined in places by the disenfranchisement of some groups and the lack of full representation in Congress. Campaign finance rules do not guarantee full transparency, the observers said. While the elections were largely administered in a professional manner, decisions on important aspects of the electoral process were often politicized, the statement says.

“The American people once again demonstrated their commitment to democratic elections in a hard-fought and vibrant campaign that clearly engaged voters and had millions eagerly awaiting results last night,” said George Tsereteli, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “While the rhetoric we heard from the campaign trail was often divisive, Americans came together to vote in professionally run elections.”

There was an overall respect for fundamental freedoms in a campaign that was dominated by the two main parties. The intolerant rhetoric included several statements with xenophobic and anti-Semitic connotations, the statement says. Concerns were raised regarding online disinformation from both domestic and foreign sources, as well as regarding the transparency of online advertising. The legal framework and the administration of elections are complex and diverse. As there are few nationwide procedural standards, detailed rules are made only at the state and sub-state level.

A number of states enhanced efforts to facilitate voter



registration, including online and automatic registration, but an estimated 50 million eligible citizens were not registered for these elections, for various reasons. Legislation and established practices effectively disenfranchised around 11 million otherwise eligible voters, the statement says. Voter identification is a politically divisive issue, and rules in some states can present obstacles to voters.

“These were well-run elections, but the diverse nature of the American system means that there isn’t a single picture. We welcome progress in some states to facilitate voter registration and to reinstate voting rights to citizens, but we cannot ignore that countless millions remain effectively disenfranchised,” said Isabel Santos, Head of the 83-member OSCE PA delegation. “Much more attention and investment in democracy remains critical if the United States is to overcome these longstanding challenges and address new ones, like effectively securing election infrastructure.”

On election day, 136 observers were deployed, including 53 observers deployed by the ODIHR limited election observation mission, led by Tana de Zulueta. Observers were drawn from 33 OSCE participating States and one Partner for Co-operation.

## Chair of OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism addresses Vienna conference



Makis Vouridis, Chair of the OSCE PA’s Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT), was in Vienna last week participating in the second OSCE-wide Seminar on Passenger Data Exchange. Vouridis spoke on 1 November at the conference’s introductory session, focusing his remarks on the resolution on preventing terrorism that was adopted

by the OSCE PA at last summer’s Annual Session in Berlin. He discussed possible ways in which the OSCE PA and parliamentarians can promote compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 2396, which urges countries to strengthen their efforts to stem the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters.

Vouridis discussed the work of the CCT, noting that it is tasked to assess emerging trends and promote co-ordination with the OSCE governmental structures and other key partners, such as the UN and its agencies. He also met in Vienna with Luca Fratini, Deputy Head of Mission at the Permanent Representation of Italy at the OSCE, for discussions focused on PA input on counter-terrorism at the upcoming Milan Ministerial Council. Vouridis’s visit was supported by Marco Bonabello at the OSCE PA’s Vienna Liaison Office.