

## Observers: Fundamental freedoms respected in competitive Montenegro elections



Azay Guliyev and Margareta Cederfelt observing in Podgorica.

Montenegro's 16 October parliamentary elections were held in a competitive environment and fundamental freedoms were generally respected in a campaign characterized by a lack of distinct domestic policy alternatives and permeated by personal attacks, according to a statement delivered Monday by Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden), Special Co-ordinator of the short-term OSCE observer mission. While pluralistic, the media lacked editorial independence, observers said.

The election administration met all legal deadlines, but despite increased operational and human resources, the professional capacity of the administration remains inadequate. Election day proceeded in a calm and orderly manner, with few cases of irregularities observed, the statement says.

"Against a campaign background characterized by a divisive debate over foreign policy questions, these elections were held in a competitive environment and fundamental freedoms were generally respected," said Cederfelt. "The positive changes we have observed demonstrate a genuine will to improve the process."

"The elections have shown the aspiration of the people of Montenegro to be fully engaged in building the stable democratic future of their country," said Azay Guliyev (Azerbaijan), Head of the OSCE PA delegation. "However, the improvements in election administration and media professionalism would benefit future elections."

The election administration, led by the State Election Commission (SEC), worked in a largely transparent manner and met all legal deadlines. But despite increased operational capacity, the SEC still lacks professional capacity and a strong collective leadership, the observers said.

Revisions to the legal framework since the last elections addressed a number of prior recommendations, although some remain unaddressed. In addition, the legal framework continues to lack comprehensiveness and some inconsistencies have led to occasional misinterpretations, the observers said.

Members of national minorities were afforded a fair opportunity to participate in the electoral process, both as candidates and as voters, the statement says. The limited number of complaints filed with law enforcement and judicial bodies was attributed to lack of trust in the effectiveness and impartiality of these institutions, observers said.

The 42-member delegation of the OSCE PA worked closely with partners from the OSCE/ODIHR and PACE. The PA mission was supported by Francesco Pagani, Iryna Sabashuk, Maria Chepurina, Odile Lelarge, James Lishman, and Sonja Stanisavljevic from the International Secretariat.

## Harstedt participates in Belarus-related events in Stockholm and Brussels

OSCE PA Vice-President and Chair of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus Kent Harstedt participated last week in forums in Stockholm and Brussels focused on following up on the 11 September 2016 parliamentary elections in Belarus and other developments in the country. Held in the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) on 12 October, the Stockholm seminar included the participation of Tatsiana Karatkevich, runner-up in the Belarusian presidential election of 2015, who discussed the political situation in the country along with OSCE PA Member Christian Holm Barenfeld (Sweden), Head of the ODIHR Director's Office Jean Froehly, and a number of other experts on Belarus.

Hartstedt, who served as Special Co-ordinator of the short-term observer missions to both the 2015 and 2016 elections, noted the steps that the Belarusian Central Election Commission has taken in addressing some technical aspects of the electoral process. He pointed out however that these did not address many key long-standing concerns of the OSCE.

The following day at the European Parliament in Brussels, Harstedt participated in a seminar organized by

the EURONEST PA, which promotes political association and economic integration between the European Union and the Eastern European Partners. The EURONEST forum on 13 October provided an opportunity for an exchange of views on the outcome of recent elections. It included the participation of Tana De Zulueta, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term election observation mission in Belarus, Thomas Mayr-Harting of the European External Action Service, and representatives of the Belarusian political opposition.

Harstedt was accompanied in Stockholm and Brussels by Marc Carillet, Deputy Director of the Vienna Liaison Office. Belarus will host the PA's 26th Annual Session in July 2017.



Tatsiana Karatkevich, Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom, and Kent Harstedt in Stockholm, 12 Oct. 2016