



Belarus still has considerable way to go in meeting OSCE commitments, despite certain improvements, election observers say

MINSK, 20 December 2010 – Yesterday’s presidential election showed that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments, although some specific improvements were made, concluded the international observers from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA).

Election night was marred by the detention of most presidential candidates and hundreds of activists, journalists and civil society representatives. While voting on election day was overall assessed positively, the process deteriorated significantly during the vote count, with observers assessing almost half of vote counts monitored as bad or very bad. This undermined the steps that had been taken to improve the election.

“This election failed to give Belarus the new start it needed. The counting process lacked transparency. The people of Belarus deserved better. And, in particular, I now expect the Government to account for the arrests of presidential candidates, journalists and human rights activists,” said Tony Lloyd who leads the short-term OSCE observer mission and heads the delegation of the OSCE PA.

“I had very much hoped that this time we would be able to make a more positive assessment. Unfortunately, this is not possible in light of the flawed vote count and the authorities’ heavy-handed response to yesterday’s demonstrations,” said Ambassador Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term election observation mission. He encouraged the Belarusian authorities to remain committed to their OSCE obligations and not halt the democratic reforms indispensable for bringing elections in line with international standards.

The observers noted that during the campaign, all candidates were able to convey their messages to the electorate in an unhindered manner. They could address the electorate directly through two TV debates and free airtime provided to them in an uncensored but limited format.

Nevertheless, the current president and the other contenders competed on unequal terms. There were cases of misuse of administrative resources to promote the incumbent. Nation-wide broadcasters devoted some 90 per cent of political news to the current president. The lack of media diversity reduced the possibility for voters to make an informed choice.

The Central Election Commission administered the technical aspects of the election process well and in a transparent manner, but lacked impartiality. Although the election legislation allows for a pluralistic composition of election commissions, in practice less than 1 per cent of commission members represented the opposition.

Despite some improvements in the election legislation, the legal framework still does not adequately guarantee the conduct of elections in line with OSCE commitments. Important aspects of the process are not fully regulated. This includes the lack of safeguards to ensure the integrity of early voting and the vote count.

For further information contact:

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer, OSCE/ODIHR, +375 29 3931456 or +48603683122, jens.eschenbaecher@odihr.pl

Petra Jezkova, OSCE PA, +375 293951797 or +45 6010 8173, petra@oscepa.dk