

## ‘No level playing field,’ says Hastings



### Hastings briefs world media

“The Belarusian people deserve better.” Delivering the conclusions of the OSCE’s election observation mission to the March 19 Belarus Presidential election, PA President Alcee L. Hastings reported that the election did not meet OSCE commitments.

In a press conference in Minsk on Monday March 20, Hastings highlighted that the four candidates standing for election had presented a genuine choice to voters, however, it was not a level playing field. Actions by state authorities amounted to a “pattern of intimidation,” reported the President. Hastings applauded the courageous efforts of opposition candidates to continue campaigning against the incumbent administration in face of arbitrary restrictions, limitations and obstructions placed in their path. The State controlled media granted the incumbent President extensive and favourable coverage, while virtually ignoring the other three candidates, the International Election Observation Mission reported.

Belarus also failed to live up to its international commitments by arbitrarily preventing 19 members of the OSCE PA delegation from participating in the observation effort, Hastings said.

President Hastings led the OSCE PA delegation of 126 members (of which 19 were denied entry to Belarus), and led the overall OSCE election observation effort as the Special Coordinator of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht. The OSCE observation mission was a joint effort of the OSCE PA and the OSCE/ODIHR, and included over 500 observers on election day.

Congressman Hastings was accompanied by PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver, Deputy-Secretary General Tina Schøn, Programme Officers Anna Chernova and Andreas Baker, and Research Assistant Marc Carillet from the International Secretariat and Vanessa Griddine from his personal staff.



### ... and OSCE participating States

Following the OSCE press conference in Minsk on March 20, President Hastings traveled to Vienna to address the OSCE Permanent Council on Tuesday March 21. Hastings reported that OSCE commitments had not been met in the Belarusian election, but stressed that the mission had presented a balanced picture of the electoral process, fully recognizing that Belarus is a society in transition that has only recently started its process of democratization. He further stressed the Assembly’s willingness to continue dialogue with the Belarusian parliament as well as other authorities in Belarus.

President Hastings also discussed the OSCE PA’s election observation programme, noting that “as politicians who have fought elections themselves, parliamentarians have particular expertise in political campaigns and electoral processes, bringing added credibility to the conclusions of OSCE observation missions.”

Ambassadors of several participating States welcomed the Assembly’s election-related work.



*Hastings speaks to the Belarusian Ambassador to the OSCE following his address to the Permanent Council.*