

News from Copenhagen

Observers: Belarus elections efficiently organized, shortcomings remain



Kent Harstedt and Ivana Dobesova speak to the press in Minsk.

In a statement delivered Monday in Minsk, OSCE observers noted that the 11 September parliamentary elections in Belarus were efficiently organized and there were visible efforts to address some long-standing issues, but a number of systemic shortcomings remain.

Kent Harstedt (Sweden), Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission, delivered the statement, which stressed that the legal framework restricts political rights and fundamental freedoms, and was interpreted in an overly restrictive manner. Media coverage did not enable voters to make an informed choice and, despite an increase in the number of candidates, including from the opposition, the campaign lacked visibility, the statement says.

The election administration exhibited a welcoming approach towards international observers. The composition

of the electoral commissions, however, was not pluralistic, which undermined confidence in their independence.

“It remains clear that Belarus still has some way to go to fulfill its democratic commitments. In the run-up to the elections, the authorities made a number of promises regarding the transparency of the process, on which they delivered partially, but insufficiently,” said Harstedt. “We hope the Belarusian government, together with the newly elected parliament, will carry on with the democratization process and undertake a comprehensive effort to address our long-standing recommendations.”

Ivana Dobesova (Czech Republic), Head of the PA delegation, noted that some members of the opposition will be represented in parliament for the first time in 12 years. “However, the legal and constitutional framework limits public space for debate, and did not provide voters with the opportunity to make an informed choice,” she said. “We encourage all members of parliament to use this opportunity to engage in genuine discussions about the future of the country.”

The mission was a common endeavour of the OSCE PA, OSCE/ODIHR, and PACE. The PA deployed a 31-member delegation supported by Andreas Nothelle, Marc Carillet, Loic Poulain, and Anna Di Domenico from the Secretariat.

Members of OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration visit Sicily, call for support

Members of the OSCE PA’s Ad Hoc Committee on Migration were in Sicily last week, where they witnessed first-hand the challenges faced by refugees, migrants, aid workers and authorities related to the ongoing migration crisis impacting the continent. Noting that Italy is doing more than its share in terms of hosting refugees and migrants, Ad Hoc Committee Chair Filippo Lombardi (Switzerland) stressed the need for greater responsibility-sharing among all of Europe and better co-ordination of law enforcement efforts to combat crimes related to the crisis, including human trafficking.

The delegation was hosted by Ad Hoc Committee on Migration Vice-Chair Guglielmo Picchi (Italy), who commended the work of the authorities and reiterated the pressing need for more support. The nine members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration met with officials from the Italian Interior Ministry, Port Authorities, UN Refugee



Visit to a reception center for asylum seekers in Catania

Agency, Frontex, International Organization for Migration, Save the Children, and the Italian NGO Doctors for Human Rights in a fact-finding mission intended to inform recommendations to be presented to governments, parliaments and the international community. It follows a similar visit by members of the committee to Calais, France, in May, and will be followed up with a visit to Greece in the coming weeks.

The visit to Sicily on 8 September was supported by OSCE PA Programme Officer Farimah Daftary.

OSCE PA President Emeritus Kanerva appointed Special Representative on Mediation

President Emeritus Ilkka Kanerva (Finland) was appointed last week the Assembly’s first Special Representative on Mediation. Kanerva’s mandate includes acting as the primary point of contact within the PA on mediation and the conflict cycle, as well as co-ordinating the PA’s efforts and activities aimed at strengthening the PA’s preparedness for mediation and dialogue facilitation. The appointment follows a number of recommendations that were agreed to by the Assembly at

the Tbilisi Annual Session in July, as well as the OSCE PA’s Resolution on the Development of Mediation Capacity in the OSCE area adopted at the Baku Session in 2014.

Kanerva will also be serving as Special Co-ordinator of the short-term OSCE observer mission to the Russian Federation for the 18 September parliamentary elections. Second Committee Rapporteur Marietta Tidei (Italy) will head the OSCE PA’s delegation of nearly 100 observers.