

Observers: Poland's elections were competitive but marked by misuse of public resources

Characterized by record high voter participation, Poland's 15 October elections offered voters a wide choice of political options and candidates were able to campaign freely, observers said in a statement issued on Monday, but the campaign was tarnished by notable overlap between the ruling party's messages and government information campaigns. Together with distorted and openly partisan coverage by the public broadcaster, this provided a clear advantage to the ruling party, undermining the democratic separation of state and party.

"This Sunday's parliamentary elections, while offering Polish voters different political alternatives, took place in a complex and polarized political environment," said Special Co-ordinator Pia Kauma (Finland). "This translated into a campaign dominated by a highly confrontational tone, with regular use of inflammatory rhetoric and personal attacks against the main party leaders."

Election day itself was calm, and the process was efficient and well organized in the polling stations visited by observers. However, the secrecy of the vote was frequently compromised by overcrowding, voting booths not being spacious enough, and voters marking ballots outside the booths. While concerns about independence of the judiciary remain, the handling of election-related cases by the Supreme Court was transparent and supported greater observer participation.

While freedoms of association and assembly were respected in a pluralistic campaign, it was marred by the misuse of state resources. The overlap between the ruling party's campaign messages and government information campaigns as well as state-controlled companies and their foundations, including on the referendum, gave a further significant advantage to the ruling party.

"While the elections in Poland were competitive, we noted the erosion of checks and balances to gain further control over state institutions by the governing party, including the courts and the public media," said OSCE PA



Special Co-ordinator Pia Kauma and Head of OSCE PA Delegation Pere Joan Pons at a polling station in Warsaw, 15 October 2023

Head of Delegation Pere Joan Pons (Spain). "This tilted the playing field, which meant the opposition did not have fully equal opportunities."

While Poland's media landscape is diverse, the purchase of most regional daily newspapers and many other regional media outlets by a state-controlled energy company, attempts to limit foreign media ownership, and protracted license renewal processes indicate increasing political control by the government.

The PA worked closely with the OSCE/ODIHR mission, led by Douglas Wake, and observers from PACE, led by Mireille Clapot. The international election observation mission to the Polish parliamentary elections totalled 154 observers from 44 countries, consisting of 33 ODIHR-deployed experts and long-term observers, 94 parliamentarians and staff from the OSCE PA, and 27 from PACE.

This was the first time the OSCE PA observed in the country. From the International Secretariat the PA delegation was supported by Andreas Baker, Stephanie Koltchanov, Freyja Koci, Anna Di Domenico, Dimitrije Todoric, Manucheckr Salokhudinov, Hana Dogovic and Edoardo Castiglioni.

Special Representative on Combating Organized Crime meets Italian Minister of the Interior



Special Representative Eugenio Zoffili and Italian Minister of the Interior Matteo Piantedosi, 5 October 2023

On 5 October, Special Representative on Combating Organized Crime Eugenio Zoffili (Italy) met with the Italian Minister of the Interior Matteo Piantedosi to discuss the fight against drug trafficking, which represents one of the main sources of funding for criminal syndicates.

"Drugs, in addition to undermining social security, are cold hard cash and a source of profit for the mafia. Stopping these illicit activities means closing the taps that pour rivers of money into the coffers of such criminal organizations," said Zoffili, who also serves as Head of the Italian Delegation to the OSCE PA.

Given the significant connection between drug trafficking and organized crime, Zoffili, while carrying out his mandate, has decided to integrate the fight against drugs into the OSCE debate.