

Observers find lack of genuine political alternatives in Azerbaijan's first nationwide election



Artur Gerasymov and Daniela De Ridder with Secretariat staff outside of a polling station in Baku, 7 Feb. 2024

A joint observation mission from the OSCE PA and OSCE/ODIHR concluded on 7 February that lack of genuine political alternatives in a restricted environment characterized Azerbaijan's early presidential election. This was the first election to be held throughout the internationally recognized territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, an issue that dominated the campaign and was echoed in public sentiment. Longstanding restrictions on freedoms of association and expression were reinforced by recent legal amendments and resulted in legislation not in line with international standards, observers said in a statement delivered in Baku by OSCE PA Second Committee

Vice-Chair Artur Gerasymov (Ukraine), Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers.

"We have witnessed a historic moment in Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, in this first presidential election held across the entire territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan since independence," said Gerasymov. "The early presidential election was held in a restrictive environment, and while it was efficiently prepared, critical voices and political alternatives were largely absent."

OSCE PA Vice-President Daniela De Ridder (Germany), who led the OSCE PA delegation, noted that there was an absence of an engaged and informative public campaign between political alternatives. "The media environment remained extremely constrained," she further highlighted, "leaving voters without the possibility to meaningfully inform themselves about the options on voting day."

The international election observation mission totaled 335 observers from 42 countries, including 256 from ODIHR and 79 from the OSCE PA.

Winter Meeting to stream live at YouTube and oscepa.org

The OSCE PA's 23rd Winter Meeting, taking place 22-23 February, will feature speeches by high-level OSCE officials, including Chairperson-in-Office Ian Borg, Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, and OSCE PA President Pia Kauma, as well as President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka. For details on the programme, as well as practical and logistical information or to watch the livestream, please click here: <https://bit.ly/3H9ZvOF>

President Kauma addresses OSCE Permanent Council, meets with diplomats in Vienna

OSCE PA President Pia Kauma (Finland) was in Vienna last week, where she addressed the Permanent Council on 8 February. In her remarks, she expressed support for the Maltese OSCE Chairpersonship, welcoming the engagement shown by OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Ian Borg and his commitment to collaborative diplomacy.

Kauma informed the Permanent Council of the OSCE PA's work on Ukraine, including a visit to Kyiv earlier in the week, and highlighted other areas of focus, noting in particular the PA's work on the South Caucasus, South East Europe and Central Asia, as well as migration, combating corruption and countering terrorism.

Following her address, several OSCE delegations took



Maltese Charge d'Affaires Deborah Borg and President Pia Kauma, Vienna, 8 Feb. Photo: Micky Kroell/OSCE

the floor to respond to President Kauma's remarks, with several ambassadors welcoming the PA's contributions. While in Vienna, the President held a number of bilateral meetings with representatives of OSCE participating States, stressing the OSCE PA's openness to engagement with the OSCE's governmental side, in particular on how to safeguard the functionality of the OSCE.

Special Representative Vigenin highlights OSCE's crucial role in Moldova



Kristian Vigenin meeting with Veronica Rosca and Roman Rosca from the PA's Moldovan Delegation, Chisinau, 13 Feb.

OSCE PA Special Representative for Eastern Europe Kristian Vigenin (Bulgaria) concluded today a three-day visit to Moldova, where he held meetings with the President of the Parliament, Igor Grosu, the Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Oleg Serebrian, parliamentary committee chairs, the Delegation of Moldova to the OSCE PA, mem-

bers of the opposition, and foreign ministry officials.

Emphasizing the critical importance of international support for Moldova, particularly amidst challenges posed by Russia's war against Ukraine, Vigenin highlighted Moldova's generous welcoming of Ukrainian refugees and its commitment to pursuing reforms towards EU integration.

Throughout the visit, Vigenin underlined the value of robust co-operation with the OSCE, including the PA. Interlocutors highlighted the reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption as key priorities. Ahead of Moldova's presidential election this autumn, discussions expressed concern over disinformation and foreign interference in electoral processes. Special Representative Vigenin was joined throughout his visit by Ambassador Kelly Keiderling, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova.