

News from Copenhagen

Picula leads Kazakhstan election observation mission



Tonino Picula at a polling station in Almaty



Walburga Habsburg Douglas at a polling station in Almaty

More than 1,000 international observers accepted the government of Kazakhstan's invitation to observe the 3 April presidential election, including several hundred from the OSCE. Tonino Picula, former Foreign Minister of Croatia, headed the OSCE PA's delegation to Kazakhstan and was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office to deliver the post-election statement on behalf of the OSCE. Walburga Habsburg Douglas (Sweden) and Matteo Mecacci (Italy) served as deputy heads of the OSCE PA's delegation.

PA observers were deployed throughout the country, particularly in the Astana and Almaty regions. The participants were extensively briefed by NGOs, representatives of political parties, presidential candidates, election officials and OSCE long-term observers. The observation mission noted progress in Kazakhstan since the country's independence but said that reforms need to be implemented before the next parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan.

While the election was technically well administered, the absence of opposition candidates and of a vibrant political discourse resulted in a non-competitive environment. A limited field of candidates did not seek to challenge the incumbent.

"While Kazakhstan has achieved a lot since independence,

this election has showed that the country still needs to make improvements to meet democratic commitments, particularly in the fields of freedom of assembly and media," said Special Co-ordinator Tonino Picula. "Despite this election showing a lack of expected progress, we hope the country will use it as a learning experience to improve future elections and ensure genuine competition."

Compared to the last presidential election, the media provided more equality in covering candidates in the news programmes, but outside the news there was little analytical election-related coverage, diminishing the ability of voters to make a fully informed choice. "On the positive side," Mr. Picula said, "we were pleased to see a proactive government effort to transparently update the voter lists."

Mr. Picula also noted that women were well represented at many levels of election administration.

The PA's election observation mission consisted of around 80 observers and was supported by Deputy Director of Field Operations Roberto Montella, Senior Counsellor Semyon Dzakhaev, Programme Officer Anna Chernova, Logistics Officer Petra Jezkova, Communications Director Neil Simon and Secretary General Spencer Oliver from the Secretariat.

Spring 2011 team of OSCE PA research fellows begins

Three new research fellows joined the International Secretariat in Copenhagen this month: Bojana Perisic, Nathan Robinson and Elsa Gonzalez-Holguera.

Bojana Perisic, from Serbia, holds a degree in English Literature and Language Teaching from the University of Belgrade, and a Master's Degree in British Studies and Culture and Media Management. She spent a year working at the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin. Ms. Perisic speaks Serbo-Croatian, English, German and Spanish.

Nathan Grison has previously worked for the Harvard Center for European Studies, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and a Master's Degree in International Affairs from the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po Paris), and has also studied at Harvard University. He holds

dual French and British citizenship and is fluent in French, English and Russian.

Elsa Gonzalez-Holguera, a dual national of France and Spain, holds a Bachelor's Degree in European Studies from King's College London and a Master's Degree in European Affairs from Sciences Po Paris. During her Master's programme she worked as a political analyst for the Paris-based think tank Europower and published articles on the European Union. Elsa speaks French, Spanish and English and is currently learning Danish.

The new research fellows join Iryna Sabashuk from Ukraine, who has been at the Secretariat since September 2010. Ms. Sabashuk has studied at Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University and holds Master's Degrees in English and German Philology. She speaks English, Russian, German, and Italian.