

Belarusian elections ‘not competitive,’ says Mecacci



Matteo Mecacci at a polling station in Minsk.

The Belarusian 23 September parliamentary elections failed to meet OSCE commitments on citizens’ democratic rights to associate, to stand as candidates and to express themselves freely, concluded the international observers from the OSCE PA and ODIHR. The elections were not administered in an impartial manner and the complaints and appeals process did not guarantee effective remedy, the observers found.

“This election was not competitive from the start,” said Matteo Mecacci in delivering the post-election statement on behalf of the OSCE at a press conference in Minsk on Monday. “A free election depends on people being free to speak, organize and run for office, and we didn’t see that in this campaign. We stand ready to work with Belarus to take the steps forward that are in our common interest.”

Mecacci, who was appointed by the OSCE Chair-in-

Office as Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission on the nomination of OSCE PA President Riccardo Migliori, led more than 60 observers from the OSCE PA, including 54 members of parliament. Two PA members, Marieluise Beck of Germany and Emanuelis Zingeris of Lithuania, were denied entry to Belarus by the authorities, who said their presence in Belarus was “unwelcome.”

The observers found that while there was an increase in the number of candidates put forward by parties, prominent political figures who might have played a role remained in prison or were not eligible to register because of their criminal record. Despite improvements made to the electoral law in amendments in 2010 and 2011, the legal framework does not adequately guarantee the conduct of elections in line with OSCE commitments and international standards.

No opposition representatives made it to parliament. The new parliament also has fewer political party members than the outgoing parliament.

From the International Secretariat, the OSCE PA’s election observation mission was supported by Special Representative Andreas Nothelle, Programme Director Anna Chernova, Deputy Director of Administration Marc Carillet, Operations Officer Iryna Sabashuk, Programme Officer Maria Chepurina and Communications Director Neil Simon.

Migliori addresses HDIM and CoE Conference

Addressing the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights’ annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw on Monday, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Riccardo Migliori called for an honest implementation of the 1997 Co-operation Agreement in joint OSCE PA-ODIHR election observation activities.

As “an agreement which was conceived to better co-ordinate our efforts and that constitutes the foundation of our joint election monitoring activity,” Migliori said that the PA “from now on will request an orthodox implementation of the Co-operation Agreement and refuse to allow ODIHR to continue its ‘established malpractice’ regarding our joint activities.”

The president also called for a renewed focus on human rights in the OSCE. Human dimension activities at the OSCE headquarters in Vienna have insignificant media visibility, Migliori lamented, and scarce follow-up. In order to prioritize the human dimension of the organization, Migliori urged formalizing the role of civil society within the OSCE, as called for in the OSCE PA’s Monaco Declaration, by establishing an advisory board comprised of representatives from leading NGOs working on OSCE issues.

Speaking at the European Conference of Presidents

of Parliaments, organized in Strasbourg last week by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Migliori pointed to evidence of democracy in action as indicated by “crowds of demonstrators, even in places of repression, to know people yearn for a responsive government.”

Elected representatives have a special responsibility to respond to these concerns, he said, and to “always remain the voice of those we represent.” It is up to parliamentarians to “to always keep the interests of our citizens first and foremost above the interests of any bureaucracy.”

On the margins of the Strasbourg conference, Migliori held an intense programme of bilateral meetings with several parliamentary speakers including Josefina Topalli, Albania; Hovik Abrahamyan, Armenia; Ogtay Asadov, Azerbaijan; Marian Lupu, Moldova; Ranko Krivokapic, Montenegro; Jesus Posada, Spain; Cemil Cicek, Turkey; and Mustafa Ben Jaafar, Tunisia.

In Strasbourg, Migliori was accompanied by Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares who participated on behalf of the PA Secretariat in the meeting of Secretaries General of Parliament, held in conjunction with the Conference of Presidents. Migliori was supported in Warsaw by Director of Presidential Administration Roberto Montella.