

Georgian elections democratic despite polarizing campaign



Tonino Picula delivers the post-election statement in Tbilisi.

Delivering the post-election statement on behalf of the OSCE on Tuesday, Special Co-ordinator Tonino Picula (Croatia) said that Georgia's parliamentary elections marked an important step in consolidating the conduct of democratic elections, although certain key issues remain to be addressed.

"Despite a very polarizing campaign that included harsh rhetoric and shortcomings, the Georgian people have freely expressed their will at the ballot box," said Picula, who led the short-term OSCE observer mission and headed the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation. "The process has shown a healthy respect for fundamental freedoms at the heart of democratic elections, and we expect the final count will reflect the choice of the voters."

The elections were competitive, with active citizen participation through the campaign, but the campaign environment was polarized and tense, with some instances of violence according to the statement. The observers also noted that the campaign often centered on the advantages of incumbency, on one hand, and private financial assets on the other, rather than on concrete political programmes.

While freedoms of association, assembly and expression

were respected overall, instances of harassment and intimidation of party activists and supporters negatively affected the campaign environment, and often ended with detentions and fines of mostly opposition-affiliated campaigners. This contributed to an atmosphere of distrust among contestants, the statement said.

Prior to the election, OSCE PA President Riccardo Migliori had criticized the arrests of Georgian opposition figures and civil society activists. "Arrests and charges that would take political activists out of play during an election period must be taken seriously," he said on 25 September.

Two days before the vote, amid a tense campaign environment, all heads of the parliamentary delegations issued a joint statement calling for the elections to proceed peacefully. "Political leaders should be chosen through the ballot box and not on the streets," said the statement.

The OSCE PA's delegation consisted of more than 50 observers, including nearly 40 MPs, who deployed around the country. The election observation was a common endeavour involving the OSCE PA, the OSCE/ODIHR, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

The OSCE PA's delegation was supported by Secretary General Spencer Oliver, Deputy Secretary General Tina Schoen, Director of Presidential Administration Roberto Montella, Communications Director Neil Simon, Operations Officer Iryna Sabashuk, Senior Advisor to the Special Co-ordinator Andreas Baker, and Research Fellow Wesli Turner from the International Secretariat.

A report on the elections will be made to the Standing Committee meeting in Tirana on 6 October.

Fall Meetings to focus on good governance, integration for stability

Around 140 parliamentary representatives from more than 40 OSCE countries and Mediterranean Partner States will participate in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Fall Meetings, in Tirana, Albania, on 5-7 October.

Hosted by the Albanian Parliament, the meetings will include sessions on protecting multicultural societies, the financial crisis, and the media's role in promoting good governance.

Featured speakers will include OSCE PA President Riccardo Migliori (Italy), OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier, Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha, Albanian Foreign Minister Edmond Panariti, and Speaker of the Albanian Parliament Jozefina Topalli.

Other key speakers will include heads of OSCE Missions in the region and international leaders and experts in the fields of finance, media and tolerance.



All sessions at the Sheraton Hotel Tirana will be open to the media.

The Fall Meetings will also include a meeting of the Assembly's Standing Committee, which will take place in the Albanian Parliament.