

News from Copenhagen

OSCE PA election observation mission underway in Armenia



Iryna Sabashuk and Tina Schoen leave the CEC in Yerevan following a meeting with the Head of the External Relations Department.

OSCE PA Deputy Secretary General Tina Schoen and Operations Officer Iryna Sabashuk visited Yerevan on 29-30 January, in preparation for the upcoming OSCE PA election observation mission to the 18 February presidential election in Armenia.

Schoen and Sabashuk met with the Secretary General and the Head of the International Relations Department of the Armenian National Assembly, and Anahit Gasparyan, Secretary of the Armenian Delegation to the OSCE PA. They also visited the Central Election Commission, where they met with the Head of the External Relations Department to discuss the CEC's preparatory work, as well as the accreditation procedures for international observers.

The Head and Deputy Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan briefed the PA's delegation on the office's overall work and the situation in the country, while other staff members

spoke in more detail on issues related to the office's work on democratization and good governance in Armenia. In addition, Schoen met with several representatives of civil society and experts on the Armenian election processes.

The team made contacts and prepared necessary arrangements for setting up the joint parliamentary briefing programme on 16-17 February for Members of Parliament from the OSCE PA, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament who will be observing the elections.

Interlocutors described the administrative preparations for the elections as being well under way within legal deadlines and the political campaign, which formally started on 21 January, as fairly low key at this stage of the electoral process. Eight candidates are registered to run, many of whom are self-nominated. Several of the larger political parties have decided not to participate in these elections.

In preparation for practical and logistical aspects of the mission, which will include parliamentary observers from 16 countries, Sabashuk met with local service providers and interviewed potential local assistants. Schoen and Sabashuk also met with consultants from the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission to discuss the co-ordination of deployment, logistics and the briefing programme.

The mission will be led by Vice-President Tonino Picula (Croatia), and will also include several Bureau members.

The OSCE PA has observed seven elections in Armenia since the country's independence. Deputy Secretary General Schoen has been in charge of all PA observation missions to Armenia for the past 13 years.

Winter Meeting's Special Debate to focus on crises in Syria, the Sahara and North Africa

The theme of the OSCE PA Winter Meeting's Special Debate, to be held on the afternoon of 22 February, is "How OSCE countries should respond to crises in Syria, the Sahara, and North Africa." The theme takes into account strong parliamentary interest in the ongoing crisis in Syria, as well as more recent situations unfolding in Mali, Algeria, and Egypt.

The debate follows up on a number of OSCE PA initiatives regarding the crisis in Syria, including a visit to Turkey and to the Turkish-Syrian border in November by PA President Riccardo Migliori (Italy). During the visit, Migliori praised Turkey's leadership in answering the humanitarian call in response to violence in Syria.

Coinciding with that visit, the OSCE PA released a report entitled *Humanitarian Crisis in Syria: A Special Report on the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Turkey and the OSCE Region*, which offered recommendations for parliaments and governments to co-ordinate refugee policies to address the humanitarian crisis spreading from the violence in Syria.

The Winter Meeting Special Debate also follows the adoption of a resolution by the OSCE PA's Standing Committee in October condemning an armed attack from Syria carried out on civilians in the Turkish town of Akcakale.

The meetings take place 21-22 February 2013 at the Hofburg Congress Centre in Vienna.



President Riccardo and Head of Turkey's OSCE PA Delegation Emin Onen on the Turkish-Syrian border in November.