

PA observes Bulgarian elections, notes competitive campaign



Special Co-ordinator Eoghan Murphy and Head of the PA delegation Roberto Battelli answer questions at the post-election press conference.

Bulgaria's parliamentary elections on 12 May were held in a competitive environment, fundamental freedoms were respected, and the election administration was well managed, OSCE PA election observers concluded on Monday. However, the campaign was overshadowed by a number of incidents that diminished trust in state institutions and the process was negatively affected by allegations of vote-buying.

On the recommendation of OSCE PA President Wolfgang Grossruck, the OSCE Chair-in-Office appointed Eoghan Murphy (Ireland) as Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission and deliver the preliminary post-election statement on behalf of the OSCE.

"Voters had a genuine choice in a competitive campaign, and the authorities made real steps to uphold the integrity of the election, but scandals and the recent discovery of additional ballot papers without proper explanation undermined people's faith in the political system and, more worryingly, made them question the process itself," said Murphy in his statement.

Roberto Battelli, who led the OSCE PA's delegation, stressed that democratic institutions are essential for economic and political changes to be addressed effectively. "Genuine efforts at holding democratic elections that we have seen here are not enough, and addressing this must be a top priority for both national and international actors," he said.

The OSCE PA delegation consisted of 27 observers and experts from 17 countries. It was supported by an experienced team of PA election experts headed by Amb. Andreas Nothelle, and including Roberto Montella, Andreas Baker, Semyon Dzakhaev, Iryna Sabashuk and Christian Pauzenberger. Unfortunately, as has been previously reported, ODIHR failed to live up to the requirements laid out in the 1997 Co-operation Agreement in several important respects.



PACE Head Andreas Gross (left), Special Co-ordinator Eoghan Murphy (centre) and OSCE PA Head Roberto Battelli consult prior to briefings.

Santos calls for governmental action to protect media freedom



Third Committee Vice-Chair Isabel Santos addresses media freedom seminar in Warsaw. (Photo by Piotr Markowski.)

Speaking at the start of the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar in Warsaw on 13 May, OSCE PA Third Committee Vice-Chair Isabel Santos (MP, Portugal) called media freedom the background for the other commitments related to rights of expression, assembly, and fair elections.

Referring to the OSCE's founding document, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, Santos said "The agreements made going on 40 years now must be upheld whether we are using a transistor radio or an iPhone. The platform was never the issue when debating media freedom – it was always the practice."

While in Warsaw, Santos met privately with Natalia Radina, editor of Charter 97, and RFE/Radio Liberty's Joanna Levison, to discuss potential approaches to the human rights crisis continuing in Belarus. She also met on the margins of the meeting with ODIHR Director Janez Lenarcic and had a full round of briefings at ODIHR headquarters.

Nilza Sena, a member of the Portuguese delegation to the PA, and OSCE PA Communications Director Neil Simon also participated in the Human Dimension Seminar.

Battelli represents PA at heads of missions meeting in Skopje

PA Treasurer and Special Representative on South East Europe Roberto Battelli (MP, Slovenia) and Amb. Andreas Nothelle from the PA's Vienna Office participated this week in the Regional Meeting of Heads of Field Operations in South Eastern Europe in Skopje. The two-day meeting provided an opportunity to renew the intensive relationship between the PA and the mission heads in the region, and also for meetings with local representatives and the diplomatic community.

Battelli reminded participants of the longstanding role that the PA has played in the region and reiterated the PA's recommendation to provide the missions with adequate resources, stopping the ongoing trend of diverting resources to the central institutions of the OSCE at the expense of the field operations. 2013 will be another year in which the PA devotes much of its work to South East Europe, he said, with a presidential visit to Montenegro and the election observation in Bulgaria having already taken place.