

VP Aleknaite Abramikiene speaks on democratic elections at HDIM

Speaking last week at the OSCE/ODIHR's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, OSCE PA Vice-President Vilija Aleknaite Abramikiene (MP, Lithuania) noted the enduring value of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document in helping to promote democratic institutions. In the session on democratic elections on 25 September, Aleknaite Abramikiene stressed how fortunate the OSCE is to have one of the clearest set of electoral commitments in the world, which has served both observers and participating States well, including her own country of Lithuania.

Nevertheless, there are continuing challenges in the process of consolidating democracy in the OSCE area that need to be addressed, Aleknaite Abramikiene said. She pointed out that in some OSCE countries, it is common to cite "cultural differences" in explaining democratic shortcomings, which can be misused to excuse violations of OSCE commitments.

She also spoke about the importance of good co-operation between the OSCE/ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly, both of which play crucial roles in observing elections – with ODIHR's expertise in long-term observation complemented by parliamentarians' experience in personally taking part



in elections. Aleknaite Abramikiene pointed to the 1997 Co-operation Agreement which recognizes the expertise of ODIHR and the political judgment of senior politicians.

Finally, she highlighted the recent decision by Azerbaijan to not allow a full and effective observation mission by ODIHR for their upcoming elections, forcing the shutdown of that mission, and the PA's decision to not observe in line with the decision by ODIHR. By declining to send an observation mission to Azerbaijan, the Parliamentary Assembly is standing up for OSCE commitments, she said.

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is taking place in the Polish capital from 21 September to 2 October.

Bureau to discuss refugee crisis in Belgrade on eve of Ministerial Council

As customary, the OSCE PA Bureau will meet on the eve of the Ministerial Council, to be held this year in Belgrade on 3-4 December. On the agenda of the Bureau meeting will be a discussion of the ongoing refugee and migrant crisis impacting Europe and the Mediterranean region, with Bureau members considering a joint statement on the issue. OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva (MP, Finland) will address the Ministerial on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly.

The PA has addressed the refugee crisis in various ways in recent months, with the issue featuring prominently in the Helsinki Declaration adopted in July. The Declaration includes calls for OSCE participating States to "increase their efforts to care for people fleeing their homes out of fear of persecution and personal safety, and to ensure the safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to their places of permanent residence;"

"improve mechanisms for co-ordination and co-operation of immigration policies;" and "address the specific situation of migrant children."

During a visit to southern Italy in June, Third Committee Chair Isabel Santos (MP, Portugal) called for reform of the European Union's Dublin Regulation and encouraged the creation of "advance" facilities in the countries from which Europe-bound refugees are most often fleeing. Earlier this month, Santos issued a letter to members of the Standing Committee urging greater action on the refugee crisis in line with commitments made in the Helsinki Declaration.

Although some had suggested a Standing Committee meeting in conjunction with the Ministerial Council, for logistical and budgetary reasons it was decided to hold the usual Bureau meeting instead.

Leadership change in election observation mission to Kyrgyzstan

Due to unforeseen circumstances, OSCE PA Vice-President Christine Muttonen (MP, Austria) has stepped down as Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE short-term observer mission to the 4 October parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, and Ignacio Sanchez Amor (MP, Spain) has been appointed Special Co-ordinator in her absence.

An experienced election observer, Sanchez Amor has previously served as Head of the OSCE PA Delegation for the 7 June 2015 parliamentary elections in Turkey. He is Deputy Head of the Spanish Delegation to the OSCE PA and in December 2012 was appointed OSCE PA Special

Representative on OSCE Border Issues.

Several OSCE PA staff members, led by Director of Elections Andreas Baker, have arrived in Bishkek and are preparing for the arrival of parliamentarians, as well as co-ordinating closely with ODIHR, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. The Head of the OSCE PA Delegation, Vice-Chair of the Third Committee Ivana Dobesova (MP, Czech Republic), is expected to arrive Thursday.

The election observation mission will present its findings at a press conference in Bishkek on 5 October.