

# News from Copenhagen

## Reforms needed to address electoral shortcomings in Belarus, observers say

The 11 October election in Belarus once again indicated that the country still has much progress to make in meeting OSCE commitments for democratic elections, according to a post-election statement delivered by Kent Harstedt, Special Co-ordinator of the short-term OSCE observer mission, on Monday in Minsk. More political will is needed to engage in a comprehensive reform process, the international observers concluded, noting however some specific improvements and a welcoming attitude shown towards the observation mission. The campaign and election day were peaceful, the statement says, but significant problems, particularly during the counting and tabulation of votes, undermined the election's integrity.

"It is clear that Belarus still has a long way to go towards fulfilling its democratic commitments. The recent release of political prisoners and a welcoming approach to observers were positive developments. However, the hope that this gave us for the broader electoral process was largely unfulfilled," said Harstedt, an OSCE PA Vice-President and Member of the Swedish Parliament. "Given previous promises, I was especially disappointed by shortcomings during counting and tabulation. We hope that the Belarusian government will have the political will to engage in a thorough reform process, which we are ready to support."

"Given worldwide conflicts today, I welcome Belarus' recent constructive role facilitating dialogue over Ukraine. In this regard, greater international focus on this election is inevitable, and this opportunity has not been fully embraced," said Irish Senator Jim Walsh, Head of the OSCE PA Delegation. "There is considerable work that remains to be done, most notably in the areas of more representative



election commissions and the integrity and transparency of counting procedures. We hope that the constructive attitude demonstrated by authorities to our missions will continue in pursuit of our common objective."

The campaign was low-key but became more active over the final two weeks, the observers said. Although voters had a limited choice, in a positive step, the president of Belarus ordered the release of the remaining internationally recognized political prisoners in August. The institutions represented in the international election observation mission stated their expectation that, with these releases, further such prosecutions will cease and this will mark a closed chapter.

Working closely with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE PA delegation consisted of 58 parliamentarians and staff who deployed to several regions of the country for election day. The mission was supported by OSCE PA Director of Elections Andreas Baker, Programme Officer Loic Poulain, Operations Officer Iryna Sabashuk, Deputy Director of Administration Marc Carillet, and Communications Director Richard Solash.

## Oliver gives lecture on OSCE, conducts seminar at U.S. university

Speaking last week in Williamsburg, Virginia, at the College of William and Mary, the second-oldest institution of higher learning in the United States, OSCE PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver provided an overview of the OSCE's past and present, including the unique role that the Parliamentary Assembly plays in the Organization.

Among topics of discussion at the 7 October event was the PA's Helsinki +40 Project, which was launched in January 2014 and concluded at the 24th Annual Session in July 2015, and areas that have been identified as priorities for organizational reform. Oliver spoke about the PA's involvement in election observation and the importance of parliamentary diplomacy. The full speech will be made available at [www.oscepa.org](http://www.oscepa.org)

The audience at the lecture, composed of students, faculty and local citizens, were particularly interested in the OSCE's efforts in addressing the crisis in and around Ukraine, as well as the general security climate on the continent, the refugee and migrant crisis, and developments in transatlantic relations. Oliver met with Stephen Hanson, Vice Provost for

International Affairs at William and Mary and Director of the Reves Center for International Studies, for a discussion that touched on the OSCE PA's research fellowship programme and the possibility of continuing a relationship between the university and the Parliamentary Assembly.

Oliver also conducted a seminar with the Project on International Peace and Security (PIPS), an undergraduate think tank at William and Mary, with discussion focused on OSCE-related issues and regional challenges facing Europe.

During his visit to the United States, Oliver met in Washington with U.S. Helsinki Commission members, including OSCE PA Vice-President Representative Robert Aderholt; First Committee Chair Senator Roger Wicker; and Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance Senator Benjamin Cardin, to discuss ongoing Assembly work and the upcoming Bureau meeting in Belgrade, at which the refugee and migrant crisis will be debated. Oliver also held a briefing and exchange of views with staff members at the Helsinki Commission.