

# News from Copenhagen

## Italian elections held in line with democratic traditions, says OSCE PA



Margareta Cederfelt speaks to a journalist in Rome, 4 March.

The 4 March parliamentary elections in Italy were a vibrant display of competitive democracy in which voters could readily inform themselves about their political options and could freely cast their ballots, concluded international observers from the OSCE PA Monday following their first-ever election observation mission in the country. The elections offered voters a multitude of parties to choose from, and benefitted from extensive media coverage, with diverse and critical analysis of many aspects of the campaigns. In a welcome effort, concerns about ‘fake news’ were taken seriously by authorities and media companies during the campaign. On election day, time-consuming procedures resulted in some delays and long queues for voters.

“Italian voters were once again offered the opportunity to vote in democratic elections overall in line with international commitments,” said Margareta Cederfelt, Head of the OSCE PA’s limited election observation mission. “While the election offered plenty of opportunities to engage in serious debate, migration topics seem to have played an outsized role during the campaign, and may have come at the expense of discussion on many of the other challenges facing society.”

The PA’s limited observation mission followed an invitation by the Italian Government. The mission, headed by Margareta Cederfelt (MP, Sweden), included 29 parliamentarians from 19 OSCE countries. Following meetings with election officials, party representatives, and other experts including from OSCE/ODIHR, on election day observers visited some

190 polling stations in several cities and regions.

The political landscape in Italy is quite fractured, with personalities at times playing a more important role than ideology in some parties, said the observers. A broadly inclusive approach to candidate registration enabled a plethora of parties or movements to compete in the election, fielding more than 12,000 candidates in a transparent and inclusive process. Contrary to the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, independent individuals are not eligible to stand for election, and can only be nominated by parties or movements.

The observer team noted that there appeared to be broad disillusionment by citizens with the functioning of politics in Italy – a concerning tendency previously noted in other European countries. Other observations included:

- Candidates particularly used digital means of campaigning, with social media playing an important role.
- Certain key divisive topics, such as immigration, played an outsized role in the campaign, and came at the expense of debate on other important issues facing the country.
- A reported increase in cases of hate-speech was noted as an issue of concern.
- A few isolated incidents of violence during the campaign were noted, with observers urging investigations.

The election took place under a new electoral law that establishes a combination of majoritarian and proportional systems. While the legal framework is complex, consisting of dozens of laws and regulations, it appeared to be understood by practitioners and was generally professionally implemented.

Commenting on election day, Cederfelt said, “Poll workers went to great efforts to facilitate voting yesterday, but at times faced significant challenges with the procedures, resulting in delays and long lines. The new security mechanisms are very welcome, but I hope that simplified procedures can be found to ensure consistency and efficiency.”

The PA’s observation mission was supported by Andreas Baker, Valentina Bellafante, Anna di Domenico, and Nat Parry from the International Secretariat. OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella was also present.

## Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism member Mediu addresses conference



Fatmir Mediu speaking at anti-terrorism conference, 26 Feb.

Albanian MP and member of the OSCE PA’s Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism Fatmir Mediu participated in a conference last week on preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism. Organized by the

OSCE Presence in Albania with the support of the British Embassy Tirana, the conference aimed to create platforms for awareness-raising and tackling propaganda linked to violent extremism and radicalization.

Mediu addressed the conference, noting the PA’s work on the issue. Head of the OSCE Presence Bernd Borchardt, Deputy Head of Mission of the British Embassy Sean Melbourne, and National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism, Agron Sojati, also spoke at the event.