

News from Copenhagen

Russian election well administered but uncompetitive, OSCE observers say

The 18 March presidential election in Russia took place in an overly controlled environment, marked by continued pressure on critical voices, while the Central Election Commission (CEC) administered the process efficiently and openly, OSCE observers concluded in a statement issued at a press conference in Moscow on Monday.

“Choice without real competition, as we have seen here, is not real choice,” said Michael Georg Link (Germany), Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “The Central Election Commission’s professional and efficient administration of the technical aspects of the election deserves recognition,” he added.

After intense efforts to promote turnout, citizens voted in significant numbers, yet restrictions on fundamental freedoms, as well as on candidate registration, limited the space for political engagement and resulted in a lack of genuine competition, the statement says. Positively, recent amendments significantly reduced the number of supporting signatures required for candidate registration.

The laws governing presidential elections are comprehensive, and recent amendments addressed some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. They remain highly complex, however, and include restrictions on voter and candidate rights. Amendments to a dozen different laws since the 2012 presidential election limited some constitutionally guaranteed political rights and fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression, and a number of activists who questioned the legitimacy of the election were detained.

Legal and technical aspects of the election were well administered, and the CEC held regular public sessions, undertaking measures to address persistent allegations of voter coercion. Overall, lower-level commissions prepared the election efficiently, although their were questions raised about their impartiality, the statement says.

“Elections are a critical part of democracy, but democracy is not only about elections. Some positive legal changes and the good work of the Central Election Commission are



welcome, but improving the real state of democracy in Russia requires full respect for people’s rights between elections as well,” said OSCE PA Head of Delegation Marietta Tidei (Italy). The OSCE PA’s delegation of 101 observers worked closely together with the OSCE/ODIHR long-term observation mission, led by Amb. Jan Petersen. In total, the OSCE deployed about 580 observers, including 60 long-term observers who deployed around the country on 14 February.

Television, and particularly broadcasters founded, owned or supported by the state, remains the dominant source of political information, the observers said. A restrictive legislative and regulatory framework limits freedom of the media and promotes self-censorship. The media monitored by the ODIHR EOM complied with the legal requirements to air debates and provided contestants with free airtime and space. Critical assessments were absent in most media.

Election day was conducted in an orderly manner, despite shortcomings related to voter secrecy and procedures that reduced the transparency of the counting. Tabulation was assessed positively, although some concerns were reported about the transparency of the process. Observers noted a variety of measures, some involving inappropriate pressure on voters, aimed at increasing turnout.

There was general confidence in the accuracy of voter lists, the observers said, and legal changes enabling voting in polling stations away from the permanent place of residence were a welcome measure facilitating voting, with some 5.6 million using the mechanism.

Azerbaijani journalist Emin Huseynov visits OSCE PA headquarters



Following President George Tsereteli (Georgia)’s visit last week to a prison near Baku to meet jailed journalists

Aziz Orudjev and Mehman Huseynov, Azerbaijani journalist and human rights activist Emin Huseynov visited the OSCE PA International Secretariat in Copenhagen and met with Secretary General Roberto Montella, Head of Administration for Election Observation Iryna Sabashuk, and Head of Communications and Press Nat Parry. In an exchange of views that focused primarily on the early presidential election being held in Azerbaijan on 11 April, the sides discussed the importance of strong election observation, including both international observers and domestic civil society observers.