

News from Copenhagen

Ukraine election competitive, but legal issues remain, observers say



Doris Barnett, Andreas Nothelle and Ilkka Kanerva at a polling station in Kyiv, 31 March 2019

The 31 March presidential election in Ukraine was competitive, voters had a broad choice and turned out in large numbers, international observers said on Monday. In a preliminary statement delivered in Kyiv by Ilkka Kanerva (Finland), Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission, observers noted that while the existing legal framework offers a sound basis for holding democratic elections, it was often not implemented in good faith. This negatively impacted trust in the election administration, the enforcement of campaign finance rules, and the effective resolution of election disputes, they concluded.

Fundamental freedoms were generally respected, and candidates could campaign freely, but numerous indications of vote-buying and the misuse of state resources undermined the credibility of the process. The media landscape is diverse, but campaign coverage lacked in-depth analysis and was often biased, the observers said.

“This competitive election has laid the groundwork for a vibrant second round,” said Kanerva. “I hope that this will encourage Ukraine to continue on its path of democratic development, at peace and secure within its internationally recognized borders in our community of European values.”

Doris Barnett (Germany), Head of the OSCE PA’s delegation, said: “Despite earlier concerns, election day was well administered and without disturbances. The Ukrainian people deserve praise for the conduct of these elections. I have high expectations that the results, once confirmed, will be recognized, and that the second round will be just as peaceful, orderly and efficient.”

Barnett led a 107-member delegation from the OSCE PA, which deployed to Kramatorsk, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Lviv, Odesa, and Kyiv for election day. OSCE PA Vice-President Isabel Santos (Portugal) served as Head of the OSCE PA Advisory Group and OSCE PA Special Representative Andreas Nothelle served as Chief of Staff for the mission. The PA worked closely with colleagues from PACE, the European Parliament, NATO PA, and ODIHR. The OSCE PA will return to Ukraine to observe the second round of the election on 21 April.

Migration Committee members focus on return policy in Belgium



Members of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration at the Belgian Parliament in Brussels, 2 April 2019

The Return Policy of European Union Member States and Belgium’s practices in this area was the focus of a visit to Brussels on Tuesday by members of the OSCE PA’s Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, led by Chair Nahima Lanjri (MP, Belgium).

The delegation of parliamentarians stressed that both solidarity towards people in need of protection and the return of irregular migrants are key issues for a balanced and effective migration policy. With the proposals for a reformed EU Directive on Returns currently being debated in the European Council and the European Parliament, the delegation called for an emphasis on promoting alternatives to detention.

Members expressed concern that the detention of children with families was now a reality both on paper and in practice in Belgium. Taking note of legislative changes in July 2018 and the construction of closed family units, they emphasized that these should be used only as a measure of last resort.

The first part of the programme consisted of briefings on the current status of discussions within the EU on how to make returns more effective as well as on the basic principles which should underpin return policies. The OSCE parliamentarians met with officials from the European Commission, the European Parliament, the International Organization for Migration, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and non-governmental organizations working with vulnerable children.

The second component of the programme examined current practice in Belgium, seeking to identify lessons learned and examples of good practice.

In the afternoon, the delegation visited the Steenokkerzeel repatriation centre in the vicinity of Brussels airport which is an immigration detention centre which, since the summer of 2018 also includes a number of ‘family units’ intended for the detention of families with minor children.

The delegation included members Margareta Cederfeldt (Sweden), Alfred Dubs (United Kingdom), Sylvie Goy-Chavent (France), Roman Haider (Austria) and Kyriakos Kyriakou-Hadjjiyanni (Cyprus). Farimah Daftary and Corinna Lensch from the International Secretariat supported the visit.