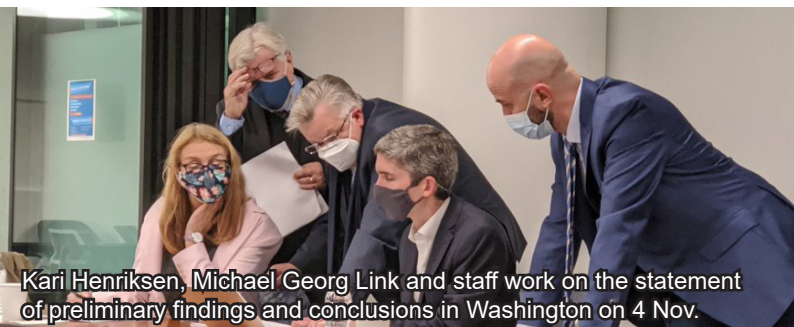


## Competitive US elections tarnished by attempts to undermine public trust, observers say



Kari Henriksen, Michael Georg Link and staff work on the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions in Washington on 4 Nov.

Tuesday's vote was hard-fought and competitive with a high degree of engagement by election workers and citizens in the face of great legal uncertainty and a highly polarized political environment fueled by aggressive campaign rhetoric, international observers to the US general elections said in a statement today.

The observation mission, carried out jointly by the OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE PA, concluded that the 3 November general elections were competitive and well managed despite the many challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the campaign was characterized by deeply entrenched political polarization that often obscured the broader policy debate and included baseless allegations of systematic fraud. Other concerns raised related to campaign finance.

"Nobody – no politician, no elected official – should limit the people's right to vote. Coming after such a highly dynamic campaign, making sure that every vote is counted is a fundamental

obligation for all branches of government," said Michael Georg Link, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. "Baseless allegations of systematic deficiencies, notably by the incumbent President, including on election night, harm public trust in democratic institutions."

"The right to vote and to have that vote counted is among the most fundamental principles of democracy," said Kari Henriksen, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. "While the United States has taken great strides toward expanding the franchise, concerns remain regarding universal adult suffrage. Women's participation in politics has also increased, but there should be greater attention paid to this. In the context of COVID-19 and the rise in mail-in voting, I am concerned about attempts to restrict the counting of legally cast ballots."

The media landscape in the US is highly polarized, but at the same time pluralistic and diverse, observers noted. Election officials worked under difficult circumstances and while emergency funds were distributed to help states overcome challenges caused by the pandemic for the organization of the elections, these were insufficient to overcome the additional challenge of the massive increase in online voter registration and postal voting. It was nonetheless noted that the public was generally confident in the work of the election administration at all levels.

The international election observation mission for the general elections in the United States totaled 102 observers from 39 countries, made up of 50 ODIHR-deployed experts and observers, and 52 parliamentarians and staff from the OSCE PA. The ODIHR's mission was led by Urszula Gacek.

## Observers: Fundamental freedoms respected in Georgian elections, but state and party blurred lines

Georgia's parliamentary elections were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected. Nevertheless, pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state reduced public confidence in some aspects of the process, international observers said in a statement on Sunday in Tbilisi.

The observation mission, a joint undertaking of the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE PA, PACE, and the NATO PA said that the technical aspects of the elections were managed efficiently, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the dominance of the ruling party in the election commissions negatively affected the perception of their impartiality and independence, especially at the lower levels.

"I commend the extra efforts that inevitably had to be made in preparations, and also commend all the people who courageously decided to go out and vote, notwithstanding the immense challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic," said Elona Gjebrea Hoxha, OSCE Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE election mission. "While there have been welcome improvements in election-related laws and regulations, there remains work to be done to provide a more solid



Pia Kauma and Elona Gjebrea Hoxha at a polling station in Tbilisi, 31 October.

base for democratic elections." Hoxha serves in the OSCE PA as Rapporteur of the Second Committee.

The OSCE PA observer mission was led by Finnish parliamentarian Pia Kauma and included 25 parliamentarians and staff. "I welcome steps taken to increase women's representation in the electoral contest, and I hope this will be reflected in the incoming parliament and government," said Kauma.

The ODIHR mission was led by Ambassador Jillian Stirk, the PACE delegation was headed by Tiny Kox and the NATO PA by Osman Askin Bak.

## Allizard represents PA at 2020 OSCE Mediterranean Conference

OSCE PA Vice-President and Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs Pascal Allizard (France) delivered concluding remarks at the 2020 OSCE Mediterranean Conference on Monday. Held under the theme, "Promoting Security in the OSCE Mediterranean Region through Sustainable Development and Economic Growth," the conference was held virtually because of the horrendous terrorist attack that took place in the streets of downtown Vienna the night before the gathering.

Pascal Allizard recalled that in recent months, the OSCE PA held numerous meetings and organized online seminars to discuss the topics such as economic growth in the context of COVID-19, women's economic empowerment and environmental cooperation. Allizard reiterated the deep commitment of the Assembly and its Members to the Mediterranean partnership while, just a year ago, the Kingdom of Morocco hosted our Autumn Meeting.