

## OSCE parliamentarians observe Armenia's early parliamentary elections



Kari Henriksen and Margareta Cederfelt meet with Foreign Ministry officials, 17 June 2021

A joint observation mission of the OSCE PA, OSCE/ODIHR and PACE concluded that Armenia's early parliamentary elections on 20 June were competitive and well-managed but characterized by intense polarization and marred by increasingly inflammatory language from key contestants. Observers also noted that women were sidelined throughout the campaign and that some shortcomings remain in the electoral legal framework.

In a statement delivered on Monday, the observers said that while recent changes in the electoral system were broadly debated and supported by the majority of political parties and civil society groups, the fact that amendments were adopted so close to the elections caused legal uncertainty and left little time to implement the new rules or inform voters about the changes.

"Despite the limited time for the implementation of the recent

amendments to the electoral code, the administration of the elections was positively assessed by the majority of our observers," said Margareta Cederfelt, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. "Most of our observers also assessed election day positively, up to and including the vote count."

Kari Henriksen, Head of the OSCE PA delegation of 71 parliamentarians and staff, noted that recently introduced electoral changes resulted in greater representation of women in the candidate lists, but they largely remained absent from the public discourse during the campaign. "It is important that women are not just equally represented, but are also given the opportunity to engage actively in public and political life," Henriksen said.

The international election observation mission to the Armenian parliamentary elections totalled 341 observers from 37 countries. PA observers deployed to Yerevan, Gyumri, Martuni, Sisian, Garni, Artashat, Masis Ararat, Nor Hachn, Vanadzor, and Sevan. On the margins of the mission, OSCE PA EOM leaders met with Armenian President Armen Sarkissian, CEC Chair Tigran Mukuchyan, Foreign Ministry officials and civil society representatives for discussions on Armenia's electoral system.

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella also participated in the mission, which was supported by staff members Stephanie Koltchanov, Tim Knoblauch, Freyja Koci, Daria Boyarskaya, Roberto Ferrari, and Sophie Jackson.

## Bowness and Lopatka speak about parliaments' role in promoting SDGs

Speaking Wednesday at the Bukhara International Forum on Interparliamentary Global Cooperation in the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, OSCE PA President Peter Lord Bowness (United Kingdom) and Special Representative on Central Asia Reinhold Lopatka (Austria) highlighted the key role that parliaments play in achieving the SDGs.

Bowness, addressing the opening session remotely, noted that parliamentarians can advance the SDGs by adopting relevant legislation and by providing necessary oversight. By monitoring implementation of the SDGs, Bowness said, parliamentarians can help ensure that state institutions are run efficiently. In this regard, he welcomed the work that Uzbekistan has done to increase parliamentary oversight.

Lopatka, who attended the conference in person, stressed that parliamentarians can help lay the legislative and political framework through which all SDGs can be achieved. He pointed out that the SDGs are a regular feature of discussions within the OSCE PA. PA members benefit from hearing from col-



Ravshanbek Alimov, Reinhold Lopatka and Sadiq Safoev

leagues who have been through similar processes, the Special Representative said.

On the sidelines of the conference, Lopatka is holding a series of meetings, including with Uzbekistan's Acting Head of Delegation Ravshanbek Alimov and Sadiq Safoev, who is a former PA member and currently First Deputy Chairman of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as Dilorom Fayzieva, Chair of the Committee on International Affairs and Inter-parliamentary Relations and member of the PA delegation.

## Recommendations issued to ensure compliance with Refugee Convention

Ahead of last weekend's World Refugee Day, the UK Parliament hosted a web conference on 18 June marking the 70th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The meeting culminated with a joint Call for Action on World Refugee Day 2021 by the Co-Chairs of the Conference, reiterating the relevance of the Refugee Convention in addressing current day humanitarian challenges.

"We cannot continue to let thousands of children, women and men perish each year trying to reach safety or in search of a better life," reads the Call for Action. "We urge all member states of the Council of Europe and the OSCE to do their utmost to save lives at sea through enhanced search and rescue operations as well as greater solidarity and responsibility-sharing."

Co-hosted by the Earl of Dundee, Vice-Chair of the PACE Sub-Committee on migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and by Lord Alf Dubs, Vice-Chair of the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, the conference focused on issues including the achievements and challenges of the 1951 Refugee Convention, migration management and voluntary relocations of refugees, and protecting lives of boat refugees.

Speaking at the web conference were representatives from the UN, the EU Commission, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum of Greece, Council of Europe, Amnesty International, and Sea Eye. Chair of the OSCE PA's Third Committee Kyriakos Hadjiyianni also spoke at the event, sharing the experience of his home country of Cyprus.