

Parliamentarians Lead OSCE Observation of 2004 Elections in the United States

Parliamentarians from twenty countries led observer teams across the United States in the first comprehensive OSCE election monitoring mission to that country. After intensive briefings in the U.S. Congress in Washington, the parliamentarians, accompanied by staff and experts from the PA International Secretariat, followed the election process, in the key battleground States of Ohio, Florida, New Mexico, and Minnesota, as well as in Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

Swiss parliamentarian Barbara Haering, Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office for the Short-Term OSCE Observation Mission to the 2 November U.S. elections, delivered the preliminary post-election statement at the national press club in Washington D.C., in conjunction with Prof. Rita Suesmuth, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Long-Term Observation Mission. They were joined by OSCE PA Vice-President Giovanni Kessler, appointed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to be the deputy to Ms. Haering, and Ambassador Stephen Nash, Deputy Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Mission. The Statement concluded that the elections mostly met OSCE's commitments for democratic elections agreed to by the 55 OSCE participating States.

In her statement, Ms. Haering said "The high turnout indicates the importance of this election for the electorate and the strong democratic tradition in this

country. Although it was not possible for our observers to access polling stations in all states, due to lack of provisions in federal or state legislation, it appears that the voting and the processing of ballots proceeded in an orderly manner. We commend the interest and patience of voters who often had to wait in long lines to cast their votes". She also emphasized that in order to meet all its OSCE commitments, the US election reforms will have to go beyond the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), particularly regarding access for international observers.

The briefings in Washington and the deployment plans were organized by the PA International Staff, which was led by Programme Officer Tina Schøn and included staff members Vitaly Evseyev, Jan Jooren, Gustavo Pallares, Sophie Richardson, and Andreas Nothelle.

Ms. Haering told reporters that the U.S. State Department had fulfilled its OSCE obligations by inviting the OSCE to observe the elections. The Parliamentary Assembly had responded, not only because of the high interest in the U.S. elections, but also because it is important that the OSCE not be seen as having double standards on election monitoring. Jan Jooren, the PA Press Counsellor, told reporters that the OSCE received enormous publicity in Europe for monitoring these elections, due primarily to the fact that Members of Parliament from twenty Parliaments were closely followed by the national press from their own countries.

