

Lloyd: “Election failed to give Belarus the new start it needed”

Speaking in Minsk on Monday, Tony Lloyd reported that the 19 December presidential election showed that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments, although some specific improvements were made.

Election night was marred by the detention of most presidential candidates and hundreds of activists, journalists and civil society representatives.

Lloyd, who headed the OSCE PA observation mission and was appointed as Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission, said that “This election failed to give Belarus the new start it needed. The counting process lacked transparency. The people of Belarus deserved better.” He called upon the Belarusian government to account for the arrests of presidential candidates, journalists and human rights activists.

In leading the Parliamentary Assembly’s team, Lloyd was supported by Vice-President and Chairman of the Senate of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who served as Deputy Head of the observation mission of more than 50 parliamentarians. The OSCE observation mission was a common endeavour of the OSCE PA and the OSCE/ODIHR.

The observers noted that during the campaign, all candidates were able to convey their messages to the electorate in an unhindered manner. They could address the electorate directly



through two TV debates and free airtime provided to them in an uncensored but limited format.

Nevertheless, the mission concluded that the current President and the other contenders competed on unequal terms. There were cases of misuse of administrative resources to promote the incumbent. Nationwide broadcasters devoted some 90 per cent of political news to the current President. The lack of media diversity reduced the possibility for voters to make an informed choice.

The Central Election Commission administered the technical aspects of the election process well and in a transparent manner, but lacked impartiality. Although the election legislation allows for a pluralistic composition of election commissions, in practice less than 1 per cent of commission members represented the opposition.

Despite some improvements in the election legislation, the legal framework still does not adequately guarantee the conduct of elections in line with OSCE commitments.

The OSCE PA mission was supported from the International Secretariat by Secretary General Spencer Oliver, Deputy Secretary General Tina Schøn, Programme Officer Anna Chernova and Logistics Officer Petra Jezkova from Copenhagen, and Programme Officer Roberto Montella from Vienna.

Nomination process for OSCE Secretary General opens

On 14 December the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev, invited his counterpart Foreign Ministers to nominate individuals for the position of OSCE Secretary General. The term of the current Secretary General, Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, expires on 30 June 2011. The informal deadline for nominations is 10 February 2011.

In his address to the Astana Summit earlier this month, OSCE PA President Petros Efthymiou specifically called for transparency and “a major search among top candidates, in order to select individuals of high political caliber” for the position of Secretary General and for the Director of ODIHR.

It is expected that the position of the Director of ODIHR, which

also expires in June, will also be advertised.

While the nomination process has only just begun, at least two high-level candidates who meet the criteria outlined by President Efthymiou are already being discussed, including Ursula Plassnik, a Member of Parliament and former Foreign Minister of Austria. Joao Soares, former President of the OSCE PA, is also being urged by his government and colleagues to consider becoming a candidate.

President Efthymiou has reiterated the importance of appointing a senior figure with proven leadership skills in politics and overseeing administration. The decision on appointing a new Secretary General shall be taken by the OSCE Ministerial Council before the expiration of the term of the current Secretary General.