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Joao Soares to lead OSCE PA observers to Kazakhstan

The OSCE Chair-in-Office, Irish Foreign Minister Eamon Gilmore, on Monday appointed OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Emeritus Joao Soares Special Co-ordinator to lead the OSCE election observation mission to the 15 January early parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan.

"I look forward to seeing how Kazakhstan's electoral process functions since legal changes were enacted after the 2007 parliamentary elections," Soares said today. "As Chair-in-Office in 2010, Kazakhstan worked hard to promote the OSCE, now we will observe how the country is upholding their OSCE commitments to democratic elections."

OSCE PA observers are scheduled to deploy to several areas of Kazakhstan, including Astana, Almaty, Oskemen, Pavlodar, Karaganda, Kyzylorda, Oral, and Atyrau. Observers are also expected to visit Aktau in the region of Mangystau, where deadly clashes recently took place between striking oil workers and police.

Soares addressed the OSCE short-term observers in Astana today, reminding them of the great obligation election observers have as the eyes and ears – and the voice – of the international community.

"As elected representatives," he said, "my parliamentary colleagues and I have a particular interest in analyzing the extent these elections are genuine and that their outcomes are legitimate. When our parliamentary perspective is added together with your expertise and the input and experience of ODIHR's long-term observers, the OSCE is able to provide important leadership in election observation in the OSCE area."

Soares will deliver the post-election statement on behalf of the OSCE at a news conference in Astana Monday.

Soares is a Member of Parliament from Portugal and serves as the Assembly's Special Representative on the South Caucasus. He was President of the Assembly from 2008-2010 and



Joao Soares, with then Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Kanat Saudabayev, addressing the 2009 OSCE Ministerial Council in Athens.

has previously led five OSCE PA observer delegations, most recently to the United States in November 2010. He has visited Kazakhstan several times, meeting with representatives of civil society and media, as well as working closely with colleagues in the Parliament of Kazakhstan, and the OSCE Centre in Astana.

The OSCE election observation mission, comprising the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, is joined by colleagues from the Council of Europe. The elections are being assessed on the basis of Kazakhstan's election-related commitments laid out in the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has observed seven elections in Kazakhstan since 1994, most recently the early presidential election last April. That election observation mission included around 80 PA observers, including 57 Members of Parliament.

Since 1993, the PA has deployed more than 3,700 parliamentarians to observe 111 elections across the OSCE area.



Since February 2002, the Assembly has held an annual Winter Meeting in Vienna, home of the OSCE International Secretariat.

Winter Meeting reminder

Completed registration forms for the 2012 Winter Meeting, to be held in Vienna 23-24 February, should be received by the International Secretariat no later than **20 January 2012**.

The second largest event on the OSCE PA calendar, the Winter Meeting is the primary venue for the Assembly's Members to receive high-level briefings from OSCE officials and discuss draft reports for the upcoming Annual Session. It also typically includes a special debate on a timely topical issue.

The theme of this year's special debate will be announced in due time.