

## PA observes elections in Uzbekistan, noting progress but need for more work



George Tsereteli, Andreas Baker and Kari Henriksen observing at a polling station in Tashkent, 22 December 2019

The OSCE PA's first-ever election observation mission to Uzbekistan concluded that the 22 December parliamentary elections were an important milestone but that there is need for further progress. Recent changes to election legislation bring it closer to the international standards to which all OSCE countries have committed, but the legal framework related to the fundamental rights and freedoms essential for democratic elections is still overly restrictive, observers concluded.

The mission, a joint undertaking with ODIHR, welcomed improvements to Uzbekistan's election law and greater acceptance of freedom of expression but stressed that the improvements did not offset the absence of opposition parties and a continuing lack of respect for fundamental rights.

"While an important milestone has been passed, old problematic habits – including on election day – make it clear that much work remains," said George Tsereteli, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. "The wide-scale reforms being pursued by the authorities in Uzbekistan have had a real and direct impact on these elections, but democratic development requires increased competition and respect for basic rights and freedoms."

"The unprecedented number of women who ran for office yesterday may be a sign of the changes happening in Uzbekistan," said Kari Henriksen, Head of the 45-member

OSCE PA delegation, at a press conference on 23 December. "While these elections were clearly more open than in the past, there remains a very limited range of alternatives for voters to choose from."

Tsereteli and Henriksen held a number of high-level meetings with leaders of Uzbekistan, including President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Tanzila Narbaeva, Chairperson of the Senate of Uzbekistan. The discussions featured a full exchange of views on a range of topics, including the elections and Uzbekistan's engagement with the OSCE PA.

Tana de Zulueta, Head of ODIHR's election observation mission, noted that the elections were an indication of a new sense of freedom, but stressed that this freedom has limits and that public dissent can still result in prosecution or detention. "ODIHR looks forward to continuing its work with the Uzbekistan authorities to help them improve their democratic institutions and take the country forward," she said.

Electoral preparations were efficient and accompanied by an intensive voter information campaign, the statement says. Election day was calm, but tarnished by multiple irregularities. The parliament has been given additional competences in recent years that could potentially make a significant change to the balance of governmental power. However, as all parties are supportive of presidential policies and there are no opposition parties, voters are left without a real choice. Recent reforms have created more space for media freedom but public dissent both online and offline can result in punishment, observers noted.

OSCE PA observers deployed to several regions of Uzbekistan for election day observation, including Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Nukuz. From the International Secretariat, the mission was supported by Gustavo Pallares, Andreas Baker, Farimah Daftary, Stephanie Koltchanov, Anna Di Domenico, Aidyn Kaiyrbekova, Manuchekhr Salokhudinov, and Iryna Sabashuk.

## Secretariat bids farewell to Deputy Secretary General, welcomes new Diplomatic Advisor

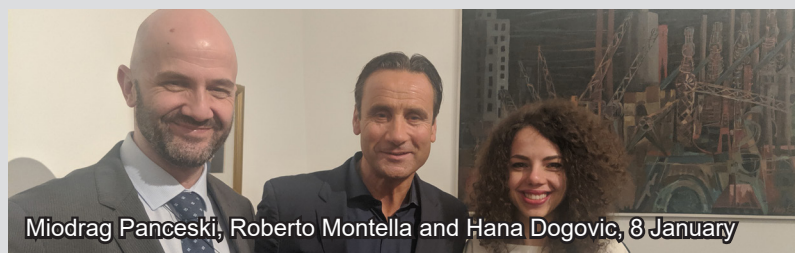
After 12 years of service at the OSCE PA, first as Senior Counsellor and then as Deputy Secretary General, Semyon Dzakhaev stepped down from his post at the end of 2019. Dzakhaev served as a member of the senior management team and provided leadership to the International Secretariat's preparations for statutory meetings. He also supported the Second Committee and the Sub-Committee on Rules of Procedures and Working Practices, and served as a liaison with parliaments particularly from the Commonwealth of Independent States.

"Semyon was a highly valued member of the team here in Copenhagen and we wish him all the best in all of his future endeavours," said OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella.

The OSCE PA's Special Representative in Vienna, Ambassador Andreas Nothelle, has assumed the functions of Acting Deputy Secretary General until a new DSG is selected and confirmed by the Standing Committee in accordance with rule 40.3 of the OSCE PA Rules of Procedure.

On Wednesday, Ambassador Miodrag Panceski joined the staff of the OSCE PA's Vienna Liaison Office as Chief Diplomatic Advisor. Panceski is a Serbian national and a career diplomat, having served more than 10 years in Vienna including during the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship. He advises the head of the Vienna Liaison Office as well as the President and the Secretary General. Hana Dogovic has also joined the VLO as Programme Officer.

SG Montella is in Vienna this week to welcome the new staff members and to participate in the opening of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship.



Miodrag Panceski, Roberto Montella and Hana Dogovic, 8 January