

Observers: despite large number of candidates in Azerbaijan, elections lacked genuine competition



Post-election press conference in Baku, 10 February 2020

The restrictive legislation and political environment prevented genuine competition in Azerbaijan's early parliamentary elections, international observers said in a preliminary statement issued Monday in Baku. Although some prospective candidates were denied the right to stand, candidate registration was otherwise inclusive. Despite the large number of candidates, voters were not provided with a meaningful choice, due to a lack of real political discussion, the statement says.

The observation mission, a joint undertaking of the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE PA, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), said that the election administration was well resourced and met legal deadlines, and the CEC made concerted efforts to act transparently and was welcoming towards international observers. However, proce-

dural violations during the counting and tabulation of votes on election day raised concerns over whether the results were established honestly, observers noted.

"I regret very much that what could have been improvements did not lead to a competitive environment enabling truly democratic elections," said Artur Gerasymov, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. "I am well aware of the impact the conflict with Armenia has on the organization of the elections in this country and value the efforts made to assure the participation of IDPs in the elections."

The OSCE PA observer mission, which was led by Albanian parliamentarian Elona Hoxha-Gjebrea and included 57 parliamentarians and staff, deployed to many locations in Azerbaijan, including to Ganja, Ismaili, Sumgait, Baku city and surrounding regions. PA observers visited a number of specially assigned polling stations for IDPs.

"In these elections, unfortunately, we saw a low level of participation of women candidates," said Hoxha-Gjebrea. None of the 55 registered political parties is headed by a woman, and only 21 per cent of candidates were women.

The international election observation mission comprised 358 observers from 41 countries. The ODIHR mission was led by Ambassador Peter Tejler and the PACE mission was led by Frank Schwabe.

Tsereteli and Montella wrap up visit to Washington, emphasizing multilateralism

OSCE PA President George Tsereteli and Secretary General Roberto Montella have wrapped up a five-day visit to Washington, where they met last week with Members of Congress, officials from the State Department, Helsinki Commission staff, think tanks and experts.

Meetings with OSCE PA Vice-President Sen. Roger Wicker, Congressmen Robert Aderholt and Adam Kinzinger focused on the importance of active U.S. participation in the Parliamentary Assembly. Tsereteli met Acting Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Ambassador Philip Reeker to discuss current priorities and efforts to ensure security and stability in the OSCE region. Tsereteli and Montella also attended the National Prayer Breakfast, which was addressed by President Donald



Meeting with Roger Wicker in Washington D.C., 5 February 2020

Trump. They had an opportunity to exchange with several guests including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

They attended and addressed the seminar on "Future Leadership for Political inclusion in the OSCE Region" hosted by the United States Helsinki Commission. President Tsereteli testified in front of the United States Helsinki Commission at a hearing on parliamentary diplomacy.

OSCE parliamentarians address high-level conference on foreign terrorist fighters



Reinhold Lopatka addressing Vienna conference, 11 February

Austrian parliamentarian Reinhold Lopatka, a member of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism, spoke in Vienna Tuesday at a regional high-level conference on foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). Lopatka focused on ways to prevent and disrupt the international travel of FTFs. He noted that parliamentarians have an important role to play in shaping counter-terrorism

frameworks and establishing the mandates of security-related bodies. At the international level, he noted, the OSCE PA encourages policy and legislative convergence among governments. Finnish MP Pia Kauma, also attending the event on behalf of the OSCE PA, stressed the importance of bringing FTFs to justice, also to prevent them from relocating to new conflicts zones, as well as rehabilitating and reintegrating FTFs and their family members.

The two-day event, jointly organized by the OSCE, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and the government of Switzerland, in co-operation with the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship, aims to improve responses on the international and national levels to current challenges related to FTFs.