

Kazakhstan's elections offered increased choice but limitations on participation remain: observers

The 19 March early parliamentary elections were held in the context of reforms introduced to bring Kazakhstan closer to holding elections in line with international standards and OSCE commitments, as legal amendments addressed several previous recommendations and provided increased choice for voters, international observers said in a statement released Monday. However, limits on the exercise of fundamental freedoms remain, and some political groups continued to be prevented from participation as parties in elections. Observers urged further changes to the legal framework to provide a sufficient basis for conducting democratic elections.

"Democracy is a process that requires constant attention and dedication. We have noted some welcome improvements, including related to election laws, but Kazakhstan will only achieve the stated political goal of democratic development if far reaching reforms continue," said OSCE PA Vice-President Irene Charalambides (Cyprus), OSCE Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term observers. "In particular, greater attention to protecting everyone's fundamental freedoms is needed."

OSCE PA Vice-President and head of the PA's delegation of observers Reinhold Lopatka (Austria) said: "The increased competition, particularly with self-nominated candidates, is a significant development. However, legal and practical hurdles continue to detract from a fully open race among equals. In the future, the publication of results for each polling station will be important for improved transparency and public confidence."

While voting was organized in a smooth manner overall, sig-



Reinhold Lopatka and Irene Charalambides at the post-election press conference in Astana, 20 March 2023

nificant procedural irregularities were observed during counting and tabulation and important safeguards were often disregarded, undermining the transparency of the process. Women remain underrepresented, observers noted, and measures to promote women's participation in public and political life are limited.

Some 80 observers from the OSCE PA participated in the election observation mission, deploying in Astana and surroundings, Almaty, Aktau, and Shymkent. From the International Secretariat, they were supported by Andreas Baker, Farimah Daftary, Stéphanie Koltchanov, Anastasiya Griadsova, Anzhelika Ivanishcheva, Michaela Stranska, Manuchekhr Salokhudinov, and Iryna Sabashuk. The PA worked closely with observers and experts from the OSCE/ODIHR, led by Eoghan Murphy (Ireland), resulting in 404 observers from 42 countries deployed by the OSCE on election day.

CCT members hold meetings in Switzerland to strengthen counter-terrorism efforts



CCT members with President of the Swiss Parliament Martin Candinas, 22 March 2023

In a visit this week to Switzerland, members of the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT) have met with a wide range of interlocutors from the international community and Swiss Government to discuss global terrorism trends and strategies to prevent radicalization in local communities. The visit started in Geneva on Tuesday and wrapped up with a series of meetings in Berne on Wednesday.

Led by OSCE PA Vice-President Reinhold Lopatka, CCT members met on Tuesday with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva where the need to preserve the integrity

of international humanitarian law, its complementarity with the counterterrorism legal framework and the relevance of humanitarian exemptions were highlighted. Members also met with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund.

On Wednesday, the visit continued with meetings at the Swiss National Parliament and with federal departments and offices dealing with the issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). With the Federal Office of Police, the PA delegation discussed current trends in Switzerland, efforts in relation to dealing with returning FTFs, and recent legislative reforms granting special preventive powers to police authorities.

The delegation was hosted by CCT member Ida Glanzmann-Hunkeler (Switzerland) and included Vilija Aleknaitė-Abramikienė (Lithuania), Ravshanbek Alimov (Uzbekistan), and Tsogtbaatar Damdin (Mongolia). They met, inter alia, with representatives from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and Federal Offices on Police Measures to Counter Terrorism (PMT).

SG briefs ambassadors at Italian embassy, discusses budget with OSCE PA Treasurer

On Monday, OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella briefed the diplomatic community in Denmark on the work of the OSCE PA during a lunch reception at the Italian embassy hosted by Ambassador Stefania Rosini. With dozens of ambassadors in attendance, the initiative was intended to raise the profile of the OSCE and highlight the work of the Parliamentary Assembly.

On Wednesday, Treasurer Peter Juel-Jensen visited the International Secretariat for a meeting with SG Montella, Deputy SG Gustavo Pallares, Deputy Chief of Finance Stephen Paul



Peter Juel-Jensen at International Secretariat, 22 March 2023

and other relevant staff to discuss the Assembly's budget. Juel-Jensen is finalizing his report that will be presented at next month's Bureau meeting in Copenhagen.