

Observers note that Bulgaria's elections were well run, but ruling party had significant advantage



Artur Gerasymov and Pascal Allizard in Sofia, 4 April.

Bulgaria's parliamentary elections were competitive and efficiently run despite the difficult circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and fundamental freedoms were respected. However, the massive use of state resources gave the ruling party a significant advantage, and a lack of editorial diversity was of concern, international observers said in a statement Monday.

The joint observation mission of the OSCE PA, OSCE/ODIHR and PACE concluded that while the legal framework is adequate for holding democratic elections, key long-standing recommendations to bring election legislation in line with international standards and good practice still need to be addressed. Observers also noted that recent amendments to election legislation, which included the use of machine voting, were adopted without meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders.

"These elections saw strong competition among an array of parties, who were able to freely reach out to the electorate," said Artur Gerasymov, Special Co-ordinator

and leader of the OSCE short-term observers. "The media environment remains concerning, however. In particular, editorial diversity and analytical coverage, crucial for voters to make an informed choice, is largely lacking."

The absence of investigative or analytical media reporting, together with political advertising in the guise of news, limited the ability of voters to make an informed choice, observers said. The ruling party gained a significant amount of exposure through a number of state investments related to COVID-19 pandemic and infrastructure projects that were launched during the election campaign.

"The decision of the Bulgarian authorities to hold elections despite the challenges of COVID times, and its efforts to secure an inclusive process while ensuring the safety of all voters and election administrators, are highly commendable," said Pascal Allizard, head of the OSCE PA delegation. "While voter lists generally enjoy the confidence of the public, the possibility to be added to the voter list on the day of the election without strong safeguards is highly problematic."

The international election observation mission totalled 92 observers from 32 countries. The OSCE PA's team of 44 parliamentarians and staff deployed on election day in Sofia and multiple regions including Pernik, Kyustendil, Blagoevgrad, Troyan, Lovech and Varna. From the International Secretariat, the PA's team was supported by Andreas Baker, Stéphanie Koltchanov, Dimitrije Todoric, Anzhelika Ivanishcheva, Daria Boyarskaya, Alexandra Toussaint, and Lærke Hulsrøj.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly saddened by passing of former President Alcee L. Hastings

Former OSCE PA President Alcee L. Hastings (United States) has passed away at the age of 84. After hearing the news Tuesday, PA President Peter Lord Bowness, Secretary General Roberto Montella and Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares issued statements of condolences to Mr. Hastings' family and expressions of gratitude for his service and commitment to the Assembly.

"As a longstanding Member of the U.S. Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, as our President, and as Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs, Congressman Hastings inspired generations of OSCE parliamentarians by championing the Helsinki Principles at home and abroad," said President Bowness. "My deepest sympathies go to Congressman Hastings's family and friends, his colleagues in the Helsinki Commission, and the numerous staff who have had the opportunity to work with him."

"Alcee Hastings was a tireless fighter for democracy, human rights, peace and justice," said Montella. "He was an unparalleled example of humanity, professionalism, competence and dignity – a man whose legacy is the pursuit of the highest moral and political standards, the symbol of what I define as a 'Politician with a capital P,' who devoted his life to the common good and to the best interest of the people he represented. May he rest in peace."



Gustavo Pallares, Alcee Hastings and Roberto Montella in Washington, 16 March 2016.

Pallares said: "There are few people who have shown as much dedication to the principles of the OSCE as my good friend Mr. Alcee Hastings. I was always impressed by his passion, commitment and expertise on international affairs, which were on display even in recent years as he battled against cancer."

First attending a PA meeting in 1996, at the Stockholm Annual Session, Mr. Hastings participated in a total of 39 meetings over the years. He served as Rapporteur of the First Committee from 1997-1999, Vice-Chair from 1999-2000, and Chair from 2000-2001. He was elected Vice-President in 2001, a position he held until being elected President at the 2004 Annual Session and re-elected in 2005.

He served as President Emeritus from 2006-2008 and Special Representative for Mediterranean Affairs from 2007-2014. He participated in eight election observation missions, serving as leader of four.