

# News from Copenhagen

## Habsburg Douglas 'cautiously optimistic' about Kyrgyzstan's democracy

The 30 October presidential election in Kyrgyzstan was conducted in a calm atmosphere, but shortcomings underscored that the integrity of the electoral process should be improved to consolidate democratic practice in line with OSCE commitments, said international observers on Monday.

"Despite flaws with the voters lists and tabulation processes, we are cautiously optimistic about the future of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. Significant work is still needed at all levels for this country to live up to its commitments to hold democratic elections," said OSCE PA Vice-President Walburga Habsburg Douglas (Sweden), the Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission and Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation.

The observers noted that candidate registration was inclusive, giving voters a wide choice, and the campaign was open and respected fundamental freedoms. This was overshadowed by significant irregularities on election day, especially during the counting and tabulation of votes. Measures should be taken to improve voter lists, to amend electoral legislation and strengthen the polling process.

The vote on Sunday was the first presidential election to occur after the country's 2010 revolution and the creation of a new constitution that aims to build a parliamentary democracy in the Central Asian country.

Election day proceeded in a peaceful manner and observers overall assessed the voting positively. A considerable number of voters were not on the voter lists and a number of cases of ballot box stuffing, multiple and family voting, vote buying, and bussing of voters were noted. The situation deteriorated during counting and tabulation, with a significant number of



Walburga Habsburg Douglas observing in Bishkek

polling stations assessed negatively. In many cases, observers were restricted from observing the counting and tabulation.

Walburga Habsburg Douglas conducted a pre-election visit on 9-14 September, meeting with Kyrgyzstan's President Roza Otunbayeva, the head of the Central Election Commission, the foreign ministry and the international community, including development agencies, in Bishkek. She participated in an OSCE parliamentary forum in the Kyrgyz Parliament and was briefed by the OSCE Centre in Bishkek. In Osh, Habsburg Douglas met with the offices of the mayor and governor, and regional election officials, representatives of civil society and political parties.

The OSCE PA's delegation consisted of observers from 14 countries and was supported by Deputy Secretary General Tina Schoen, Programme Director Anna Chernova, Communications Director Neil Simon, and Logistics Officer Iryna Sabashuk.

## Mecacci addresses OSCE conference on discrimination against Muslims

Matteo Mecacci, Chair of the OSCE PA's General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, addressed the conference organized by the Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights "Confronting Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in Public Discourse" on 28 October.

The high-level conference was attended by the representatives of the 56 governments of the OSCE and non-governmental organizations. The conference was opened by the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Evaldas Ignatavicius, OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier and ODIHR Director Janez Lenarcic.

Mecacci (Italy) underlined that for decades much of Europe's leadership had considered Muslims and Arab societies somehow unsuited for democracy. The successful elections held in Tunisia on 23 October and the demise of many dictators as a result of the Arab Spring show that the "cultural relativism" developed by Western intellectuals and on which populism and extremism flourish, needs to be

put aside and replaced with institutional relationships with Muslim nations, he said.

"It is important to note that Muslim societies have an historical challenge to confront," said Mecacci, "and this is the relationship with a modern and secular society where individual, and not community rights are at the center of the relationship between the citizens, the State, and regional organizations. But we cannot expect this to happen overnight after decades of dictatorship."



Matteo Mecacci speaking to OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier in Vienna