

Elections in Belarus did not meet important international standards, observers say



Ditmir Bushati and Margareta Cederfelt observing at a polling station in Minsk, 17 Nov. 2019

The OSCE PA wrapped up its election observation mission in Belarus with a press conference in Minsk on Monday. OSCE PA Vice-President and OSCE Special Co-ordinator Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden) delivered the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions, noting that the 17 November early parliamentary elections proceeded calmly but did not meet important international standards for democratic elections.

The observers found that there was an overall disregard for fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression. A high number of candidates stood for election, but an overly restrictive registration process inhibited the participation of opposition, they said, noting that a limited amount of campaigning took place within a restrictive environment that, overall, did not provide for a meaningful or competitive political contest.

OSCE PA President and Secretary General visit Albania ahead of its 2020 OSCE Chairmanship

OSCE PA President George Tsereteli and Secretary General Roberto Montella paid an official visit to Albania Monday, as it prepares to assume the OSCE Chairmanship in 2020.

In Tirana, the PA Delegation held meetings with President of the Republic Ilir Meta, Prime Minister Edi Rama, Speaker of the Assembly Gramoz Ruci, members of the Assembly and with representatives of the political opposition. In addition, they held briefings with the OSCE Head of Presence, Ambassador Bernd Borhardt and members of the international community.

Discussions focused on priorities for the incoming Albanian Chairmanship, as well as Albania's foreign policy priorities and issues on its domestic agenda. In this regard, President Tsereteli and SG Montella reiterated the full support of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and welcomed the government's commitment to nurture the OSCE in a spirit of collective responsibility. Tsereteli encouraged all political forces to join efforts in contributing to the country's commitment to guide the OSCE next year.

The PA delegation also discussed with Albanian counterparts domestic challenges. In particular, the sides discussed the state

"These elections have demonstrated an overall lack of respect for democratic commitments," said Margareta Cederfelt, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. "In a country in which the power and independence of parliament is limited and fundamental freedoms are restricted for both voters and candidates, parliamentary elections are in danger of becoming a formality."

"Elections without freedom for debate and genuine participation, as we saw here in Belarus, are not the opportunity for the public that elections should be," said Ditmir Bushati, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. "Political actors were simply not working on a level playing field here, resulting in what were effectively non-competitive elections."

The CEC carried out an extensive information campaign, and took steps to make voting accessible for people with disabilities. At the same time, the domination of election commissions by the state limited their impartiality and independence, potentially undermining public confidence in the election process.

The 69-member delegation from the OSCE PA deployed to several areas of Belarus for election day observation, including Lahojsk, Niasviz, Stowbtsy, Baranovichi, Moguilev, Brest, Gomel, Grodna, and Viciebsk. The PA worked closely with the OSCE/ODIHR, led by Corien Jonker, and PACE, led by Lord Blencathra.



Meeting with parliamentary and government officials in Tirana, 17 Nov.

of judicial and electoral reforms and the need to address the OSCE/ODIHR's recommendations through an inclusive process.

The decision by the European Union to postpone a decision on accession negotiations was also addressed in the context of ongoing and outstanding reforms.

The OSCE PA delegation also met with representatives of parliamentary opposition groups, including Rudina Hajdari, Nimet Musaj and Adriatik Alimadhi, as well as with representatives of the extra parliamentary opposition, including the leader of the Democratic Party Luzlim Basha, Chairman of the Republican Party Fatmir Mediu and leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration Party Monika Kryemadhi.

International Secretariat staff represents PA in Bratislava and Bucharest



Reinforced OSCE Ambassadorial Retreat, 19 Nov.

Staff members of the OSCE PA International Secretariat are in Bucharest, Romania, and Bratislava, Slovakia, this week. Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares, Head of Conference Services Odile Lelarge, and Administration and Logistics Officer Dimitrije Todoric are visiting Bucharest for preliminary



PA staff meets with members of Romanian PA delegation, 19 Nov.

preparatory meetings ahead of the 2021 Annual Session. Ambassador Andreas Nothelle, the OSCE PA's Special Representative in Vienna, is participating this week in the Reinforced OSCE Ambassadorial Retreat in Bratislava for discussions ahead of next month's OSCE Ministerial Council.