

HDIM 2013

Working Session 12: Democratic elections and election observation – sharing best practices (specifically selected topic)

Rapporteur: Ömer Numan Doğrukol, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Turkey

This session focused, as one of the specifically selected topics of this year's HDIM, on sharing best practices on the implementation of commitments undertaken by the participating States in the area of democratic elections and election observation activities.

As the session's introducer, ODIHR Director Janez Lenarčič emphasized the value of democratic elections as key test to evaluate if the common values of the OSCE are in practice. Ambassador Lenarčič referred to a number of positive trends along with some negative trends. He pointed out that general improvement in the electoral frameworks, engagement and open dialogue, women's participation in elections and increased level of fairness and better monitoring of campaign finances are the positive trends while undue restrictions on voting rights, blurred distinction between party and state structures, unequal access to media and limitations on election observation missions form the negative seem to be the negative trends. Director Lenarčič drew attention to the shortfall in the secondment of long-term and short-term election observers and called on participating States to strengthen their efforts in contributing to the observation missions. Ambassador Lenarčič reiterated the ODIHR's readiness to support participating States in implementing their related commitments in co-operation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and other international parliamentary bodies.

The co-introducer of the session, Ms. Isabel Santos of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly welcomed this platform to share the best practices in democratic elections and election observation. She underlined that democracy consists of much more than elections, but elections are its necessary element. Ms. Santos stressed the importance of enhancing the follow-up as was agreed by the participating States at the 1999 Istanbul Summit. She also reminded the participating States about their commitment to the 1990 Copenhagen Document as one standard to measure quality of elections in the OSCE area. In her remarks, Ms. Santos underlined the important role played by domestic observers and called them "domestic defenders of democracy".

33 interventions were made during the session, of which 17 by non-governmental organizations. In addition, 8 participating States used their right of reply in response to prior interventions.

Majority of the statements made in this session praised ODIHR's professionalism and election observation methodology, while in a few of statements, participants advocated that ODIHR's methodology should be reviewed. One delegation criticized the scope of election observation mission deployed in one other participating State.

Some NGOs pointed out the shortcomings in electoral frameworks or irregularities of election administrations and called for more inclusive, transparent and accountable electoral bodies.

A statement made on behalf of a group of participating States highlighted the importance of early and timely invitation of observers, and underlined that democratic elections are a prerequisite of democratic government but not an end in itself.

Many States acknowledged the election-related commitments are key tools to promote democracy, emphasized the importance of election observation activities and praised the expert knowledge accumulated in ODIHR over the years.

Also, many States commended ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for their co-operation in the important area of the election observation.

Recommendations to the participating States:

- Issue timely and early invitations to ODIHR in order to allow for sufficient time to carry out needs assessment missions;
- Exert more efforts to reach a common understanding on the election observation activities;
- Provide ODIHR with better resources to ensure that the Office continues its election observation activities;
- Commit to organize follow-up work after the final reports are published by the observation missions;
- Focus on ensuring compliance with and implementation of election-related commitments;
- Ensure the access of NGOs to the polling stations in order to facilitate domestic observation.

Recommendations to the OSCE and ODIHR:

- Engage more with civil society in the election observation activities conducted in the participating States;
- The link between long-term observation missions and the short-term observation missions should be made stronger and active;
- More voice should be given to the civil society members as they possess first-hand field information compared to international observers;
- OSCE should support events and projects which could present opportunities for comparative exchange of practices experienced in Europe and with those of countries in other regions,