



United States Mission to the OSCE

**Working Session 9
Democratic institutions, including:
Democratic elections;
Democracy at the national, regional, and local levels;
Democratic law-making;
Citizenship and political rights**

As prepared for delivery by Robert G. Berschinski,
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
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More than 20 years ago, OSCE participating States offered a visionary blueprint for building pluralistic, democratic societies underpinned by free elections. As stated in the 1994 CSCE Budapest Summit Declaration, democratic institutions are among “the foundations of peace and security, representing a crucial contribution to conflict prevention, within a comprehensive concept of security.” Participating States agreed in the later Copenhagen Document that “the will of the people, freely and fairly expressed through periodic and genuine elections, is the basis of the authority and legitimacy of all government.” Elections conducted according to OSCE commitments and standards yield political representatives accountable to their electorates.

The United States underscores our strong support for the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). ODIHR’s election observation methodology is considered internationally as the gold standard for election monitoring. This year, ODIHR deployed election observation missions – at the invitation of OSCE participating States – for elections in several OSCE participating States, including the upcoming parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan on October 4 and the presidential election in Belarus on October 11. We urge both States to implement the recommendations of previous OSCE election observation missions and ensure a transparent and open vote count and tabulation.

We regret that ODIHR was compelled to cancel its election observation mission to Azerbaijan because of the government’s insistence on limiting the number of observers. We support ODIHR and its independence, which is the foundation of its gold-standard reputation for objective, impartial observation.

We commend Ukraine for going above and beyond its commitments to invite ODIHR to monitor local elections scheduled to be held on October 25, a further step to build confidence in Ukraine’s reform process. We regret that combined Russian-separatist forces are depriving areas under separatist control from having special local elections on the same day. Russia should direct the separatists to support – without any conditions – local elections in separatist-controlled areas under Ukrainian law, in line with OSCE standards, and are observed by ODIHR, as agreed in Minsk. This will afford the residents of separatist-controlled areas the representation of their choosing. We reiterate that we share the view of other partners that holding sham elections in separatist-controlled areas on October 18 and November 1 – or any other date – would be unacceptable and a violation of Minsk..

We are also concerned that some participating States continue to hold elections that may look technically adequate in many respects, but do not fulfill their commitments to conduct elections in a free and fair atmosphere. Serious manipulation of election processes remains all too commonplace throughout the OSCE region.

In Russia, election monitoring organizations are severely constrained. The offices and homes of members of Golos, an election monitoring organization, were searched on July 7 in an effort to intimidate that organization prior to the September regional and local elections. Domestic election observation plays a critical role in enhancing the integrity of election processes and strengthening free and fair elections. In those elections, we saw authorities limit genuine political pluralism by erecting significant barriers to the registration of political parties and electoral candidates, as well as to observation of the elections by independent monitors.

We urge Hungary to implement the recommendations of the 2014 OSCE election observation mission to address restrictive campaign regulations, biased media coverage, and campaign activities that blurred the separation between political party and the State.

The Turkish people advanced political pluralism in their June 7 parliamentary elections. It is our hope that the next round of elections on November 1 are conducted in an open campaign environment that affirms freedom of expression, including by the media, and the right of members of all ethnic groups to engage in the political process, recognizing that the basis of the authority of government is the will of all of the people.

In Tajikistan, the ODIHR election observation mission to the March 1 parliamentary elections concluded that the elections “took place in a restricted political space and failed to provide a level playing field for candidates,” including restrictions that “limited the opportunity to make a free and informed choice.” Election day irregularities included multiple voting, ballot box stuffing, and the disregard of counting procedures. The United States remains concerned about the government’s August 28 banning of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), which likely means the party will not be allowed to participate in future elections. We are concerned about the recent detentions of IRPT members by the Tajik government, including one member who had planned to participate in HDIM. We note that the Tajik government continues to assert a link between IRPT members and the violent attacks of September 4 but has, as yet, not brought criminal charges against them. In the interest of due process and protecting the human rights of its citizens, we call on the Tajik government to bring criminal charges against these detained IRPT members or let them go.

Albania’s local election in June occurred after a major territorial administrative reform created 61 new municipalities, demonstrating a commitment to ongoing reform efforts. The elections were overall positive, free of violence, and citizens were able to exercise their right to vote. Unfortunately, the ODIHR Election Observation Mission noted a number of irregularities, including the continued politicization of state institutions that undermines the effective administration of the electoral process and diminishes public trust in government.

Use of state resources by governing parties to maintain their political majorities is an ongoing problem in Macedonia. We call upon both those currently in power and those in opposition to work together to ensure these elections will be unquestionably free and fair. Those measures must also ensure the integrity of the voting rights of members of the Romani minority.

The April 26 snap presidential elections in Kazakhstan were efficiently administered, but they were not democratic, due to the predominant position of the incumbent and the lack of genuine opposition, limiting voter choice. A restricted media environment limited public debate and the exercise of freedom of expression. Election day saw serious procedural deficiencies and irregularities were noted throughout the voting, counting and tabulation processes, according to ODIHR's Election Observation Mission Final Report.

The United States thanks ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for their expert efforts in monitoring elections and ensuring that they are conducted according to OSCE commitments. We encourage all participating States to consider and implement the recommendations of OSCE monitoring missions to improve their electoral process.