



United States Mission to the OSCE

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Democratic Elections and Election Observation Session III

As prepared for delivery by Tova Wang
Vienna, July 13, 2012

The importance of free and fair elections as the cornerstone of democratic government was recognized by the participating States starting notably with the 1990 Copenhagen Human Dimension Document and the Charter of Paris of the same year. Ever since, participating States have enhanced their election-related commitments and have turned to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to assist them in implementing these commitments.

The main framework for assessing the participating States' compliance with election-related commitments is the election observation report issued by ODIHR. The recommendations put forth in ODIHR's final election observation reports provide a solid, documented, and objective guideline for participating States to improve the implementation of their election-related commitments, with ODIHR's assistance if necessary.

Although the participating States have enshrined the need to follow-up on ODIHR's recommendations in their commitments, they have rarely capitalized on the momentum generated by those post-election recommendations. As a consequence, ODIHR's expertise has been underutilized.

There is clearly room for a more systematic and substantial follow up to recommendations in ODIHR's election observation reports. Renewed emphasis on putting these into practice would, inter alia: improve fulfilment of commitments; maximize the benefit of election observation; prevent the same problems from recurring in successive elections; enhance the peer-review function of the Human Dimension Committee and the Permanent Council; make better use of ODIHR's recognized expertise in assisting participating States in the implementation of election-related commitments; act as a confidence-building measure in the domestic political environment; and increase the confidence of voters in the electoral process.

We therefore make the following recommendations:

- As circumstances allow, that ODIHR is able to make a follow-up visit to a country where elections had taken place shortly after (within 3 months of) the publication of ODIHR's final report, on dates jointly agreed with the respective participating State. The visit could include meetings/round-tables with all relevant stakeholders including from government, parliament, civil society, media, election administration, and others, etc. Representatives of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly could be involved in the parliamentary debates on this issue. The aim of such a visit would be to discuss and clarify the recommendations, identify priorities, and explore concrete implementation measures.

- Capitalizing on the results of the visit and the domestic input thereof, the participating State would identify compile, in close consultation with ODIHR, a list of measures for enhancing the electoral framework and propose a timeline for their implementation, as well as identify those areas where assistance is needed (for example, legal reviews, voter registration systems, etc.). Based on the list of measures, ODIHR would offer assistance, either alone or in cooperation with other international actors.
- The participating State in which elections were held could then present the follow-up activities on implementing election observation recommendations in the Human Dimension Committee and/or the Permanent Council – a practice that is becoming ever more prevalent within the framework of the Human Dimension Committee.
- The ODIHR Director, in his/her regular reports to the PC, report should report on the measures taken to help participating States comply with their election-related commitments. This would provide the framework for peer-review on the topic of election-related commitments.

Based on this exercise, ODIHR could also elaborate a compilation of thematic good practices, from which all participating States would benefit.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.