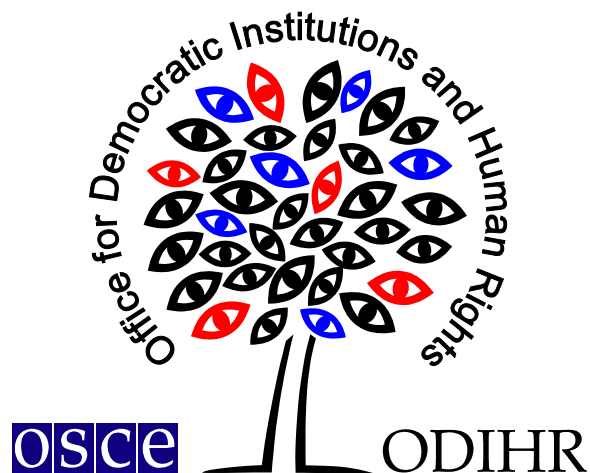


**Address**  
**Ambassador Christian Strohal**  
**Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic**  
**Institutions and Human Rights**  
**(ODIHR)**

**10th Anniversary Celebration of the**  
**Development of the Electoral System in the**  
**Russian Federation**

**Moscow**  
**29 September 2003**



Chairman Veshnyakov,

It is a great pleasure to be here this morning and to represent the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights at the 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation.

A constructive relationship has been built between the ODIHR and the Russian Central Election Commission during the past decade. In this regard, I am pleased to see my friend and predecessor, Ambassador Gerard Stoudmann, also here with us.

The ODIHR is the principal Institution for the implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments. It is located in Warsaw and is responsible for promoting democratic elections, furthering human rights, supporting democratic institution building, and the strengthening of the rule of law throughout the OSCE region.

In fact, next week the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting opens, a forum that the ODIHR hosts each year in Warsaw to review both progress and obstacles in regard to democratic institution building and human rights commitments.

Only two years ago, the OSCE/ODIHR celebrated its own 10th anniversary, and both our anniversary and your anniversary that we celebrate today serve as striking examples for the advancement of democratic ideals – and the continuing need for their translation into reality – in both the Russian Federation and in the OSCE region at large.

Today, most countries have established independent permanent electoral commissions with full responsibility over the electoral process. Although no two countries in the region share identical electoral administration systems, they all share an exceedingly important common feature – their role in democracy building – dealing directly with the organization of multi-party elections and indirectly with governance and the rule of law.

Your own experience in developing an independent and professional election management body has served as a leading model for many countries in the region. As democratization involves the construction of participatory and competitive institutions, the Russian Central Election Commission continues to exemplify the importance of electoral management bodies for democracy building.

The ODIHR has traveled the road of electoral reform together with many OSCE participating States. Not only have we observed over 100 elections, we have assisted in developing the legislative, political and practical frameworks in participating States. Elections, as crucial as they are for the democratic process, constitute only one element in these endeavors. In order to sustain this process, it is equally important:

- To develop strong democratic institutions, at the national, regional and local levels;
- To ensure the rule of law, in particular through a strong independent judiciary;
- To enable continuous participation of civil society in political processes, especially with the work of vibrant non-governmental organizations and independent media; and

- To guarantee effective protection of human rights, as laid down in international standards and commitments.

As we are now standing on the threshold of another election season in the Russian Federation, it is fitting that we are celebrating this anniversary occasion. After all, an election process itself is a celebration of fundamental freedoms and human rights. However, while we are celebrating a decade of Russia's CEC, it is worthwhile to reflect that it has only been five and a half decades since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights marked the beginning of anchoring the right of political participation as a human right in international law; and it is only a dozen years since the OSCE laid down its commitments in the Copenhagen Document in 1990. Upon this foundation of political and civil rights, the people have a guaranteed role in national decision-making through political participation.

Such fundamental human rights are ultimately secured and guaranteed through the concept of the genuine and universal election process - a concept that has been solidly planted during the second half of the 20th century - and a concept that lights the path of democratic and participatory governance as we enter the 21st century.

It is therefore a great and noble responsibility that falls on the shoulders of any election management body: the regulation of participatory democracy through an electoral framework that permits people to determine by themselves their political status and to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Given that the electorate of the Russian Federation is more than 108 million people, with more than a million electoral officers needed to implement national elections, this is a considerable challenge and a considerable responsibility.

Chairman Veshnyakov ,

This responsibility falls to you and your colleagues, and I applaud your efforts, as well as those of your predecessors, in nurturing the young democratic process in the Russian Federation through the professional and independent management of the election process.

We all know that democratic transition in the Russian Federation has not been without challenges. However, the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation has served as a beacon of hope for the democratic future of the Russian Federation.

The importance of democratic and participatory governance, as an alternative to conflict, is not heeded in every corner of the OSCE region. Experience has shown that, although fundamental civil and political rights are enshrined in the OSCE commitments and other international agreements, the protection and advancement of democratic rights is a never-ending process.

I would therefore like to call upon the Russian Federation to continue to support the ongoing struggle in defence of human rights and democratic governance. In this context, I am pleased to say that the ODIHR's co-operation with the CEC goes beyond election observation and is developing into a constructive partnership on the overall promotion of democratic election processes. Our Russian colleagues are taking

a more and more active role in OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions to other OSCE participating States, and I would like to see this co-operation further developed. We have also been working closely together on further developing and defining international commitments and standards for democratic elections in OSCE participating States.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the ODIHR highly appreciates the efforts of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation in their ongoing efforts to promote democratic elections both at home and in other OSCE participating States.

Chairman Veshnyakov,

I sincerely wish you and your colleagues every success in the challenging work that lies ahead and assure you of our continued readiness for co-operation.

Thank you for your attention.