

**Chairmanship Seminar on Election-Related Issues  
Vienna, 21 - 22 July 2008**

**Keynote speech by Dr. Kimmo Kiljunen, Special Envoy of the Chairman-in-Office on  
Election-Related Issues**

Mr Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a great pleasure to address this Seminar on Election-Related Issues that brings together all OSCE participating States and key actors in relation to elections here in Vienna.
- In recent years the participating States have expressed diverging views on election-related issues and election observation. The Finnish Chairmanship aims to enhance dialogue, through which we can understand each others views better and build consensus. Our task is to preserve and further develop effective election observation.
- This seminar will provide an opportunity to exchange views on challenges to be met and best practices in election-related matters. I would like to express my deep appreciation for the support the participating States, the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly have shown so far for the Finnish Chairmanship's efforts.
- I have the privilege to be not only the Special Envoy of the Chairman-in-Office on Election-Related Issues, but also a longstanding member of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Special Co-ordinator of several OSCE election observation missions. In this context I have followed closely the work of the OSCE and other international actors in the important and delicate process of election observation.
- My experience - also as a politician on the national level - is that elections are the highlight in any democratic society. Election Day in a representative democracy is a day when people express their will on their society's political direction. This democratic process includes that the people choose their leaders, monitor their activities closely, and can decide to change leadership whenever they feel necessary. Free choice is the essence of a democratic process and elections.
- For the realization of democratic pluralism and also for the process of election observation, Election Day is not the only essential day. What really matters is the overall process, which leads to the elections.
- The business of elections should be seen as a marathon, not as a sprint race. And furthermore, in terms of election observation it is not only important to observe the race itself and get the results, but observe the framework and the preparations for the competition. Even the doping tests must be credible.
- The key concept of the OSCE's security approach is the comprehensive security. It's not question about military security alone, but broader threats against the welfare of a society. And it's not a question about states' security alone, but citizen's security. That's why the realisation of democracy, the rule of law and human rights are central to OSCE's security concept.

- On the basis of this comprehensive approach the Copenhagen commitments on democratic elections and the related monitoring system were created in 1990. These OSCE commitments form the basis for our work today, and these are not to be debated.
- To follow-up these commitments, the OSCE started its election observation process. Thus it's a relatively new phenomenon. I already now can state that it has been a great success story.
- The uniqueness of OSCE election observation lies in the partnership and complementarity of the work of the ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The ODIHR brings in expertise through its long-term observation and technical competence, while the Parliamentary Assembly has a sense for the political dynamics and brings visibility to the election monitoring activities.
- What has made election observation a success story is the autonomous way it is conducted - autonomous vis-à-vis the host country, where the elections are taking place, but also vis-à-vis all participating States and other actors with specific political goals.
- Election observation is a neutral, non-partisan process in relation to any competing or conflicting political endeavour. Its objectivity is paramount. It must be trusted in all situations and political contexts.
- The OSCE has created a unique methodology to observe elections based on these principles.
- The methodology and practicalities by which the ODIHR / OSCE PA are conducting election observation are not carved in stone. There are always ways to improve them. Of course, it is important to take into account the particularities of each participating State's electoral system. This does not, however, mean compromising the principles of democratic elections that all participating States are equally bound by.
- I would like to stress two points from my experience as a Special Co-ordinator for several election observation missions in participating States. First, there is a wrong image that the success of election observation is manifested when mistakes or fraud are found, but that is not true. Secondly, there is a wrong image that election observation is executed only to reveal falsified elections, when the task is to support as a whole democratic processes everywhere in the OSCE region.
- There is a worldwide request for election observation today. In this regard the OSCE has been a forerunner. We can be proud that our methodology has been followed by many other international organisations and in different regions of the world. That includes in our region the Council of Europe and the European Union. But also the African Union and its Pan-African Parliament have approached the OSCE on how to organise election observation in Africa.
- Given the recent elections in Zimbabwe and Kenya it is clear that international monitoring is needed. I have had recently talks in Namibia on how important election observation will be to their democratic process in the context of forthcoming parliamentary elections.

- In the words of the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan “The presence of international election observers, fielded always at the invitation of sovereign states, can make a big difference in ensuring that elections genuinely move the democratic process forward”. Kofi Annan made this statement in October 2005 when the Declaration of Principles for International Observation was commemorated at the United Nations. This document itself is very important.
- Election observation in the OSCE has made a difference. There are still many aspects to be improved in building democracy in the OSCE region. It is understandable that there are differences among participating States how concretely representative democracy functions. In some states the pluralistic democratic system is rather new. The political culture differs. Election habits and systems differ. Nevertheless, the joint commitments for democratic elections are clear and binding.
- All participating States can benefit from election observation. And all participating States can benefit from the assistance the OSCE family can provide in building up a democratic and transparent society.
- Some argue that the OSCE has focussed too much on East of Vienna in building up a democratic society. I must admit it is true for natural reasons. I must also admit that this is a pity because in West of Vienna we could also benefit more from the expertise the OSCE provides in election-related issues.
- Let's take my own country Finland. If there would have been a full-fledged election observation in our recent elections, the observers could have found some hick-ups. I am sure that the Copenhagen commitments were met in Finland. Nevertheless, at least in some areas there would have been room for improvements: the demarcation of electoral districts, campaign financing and the role of media.
- As a matter of fact the ODIHR sent its Needs Assessment Mission to Finland for parliamentary elections March 2007 and later the Council of Europe GRECO visited the country. They gave recommendations to Finland in relation to campaign financing. The request was for tightening the rules on disclosure of campaign financing. After the elections this issue was taken up to public debate in the context of elected MPs deficient reporting on campaign financing. This process led close to governmental crisis in this spring and summer. As a result the government put forth a proposal (HE 81/2008 vp) on tightening and clarifying the rules on disclosure on campaign financing in connection with the forthcoming municipality elections. This is just one example how OSCE experts can already at an early stage see where there is room for improvements in an electoral system.
- This seminar will provide an opportunity to discuss openly and thoroughly election-related issues, including election observation. I hope this is not a forum for accusation, but a forum for learning from each others' experiences. I hope - if there would be reason - we would be prepared to exercising more self-criticism and not only criticising others.
- This seminar is one step in a long process of building dialogue among participating States. The purpose of the Finnish Chairmanship is not to solve in this year all diverging views. The purpose is to open a dialogue and pave the way for consensus-building in election-related issues, including election observation, under future Chairmanships.