



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 1 Democratic Elections

As prepared for delivery by U.S. Head of Delegation
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Moderator, the United States reiterates our strong support for the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) for their unwavering dedication to an essential component of OSCE's support for democracy: election observation. ODIHR represents the "gold standard" in international election observation and must be given the diplomatic and budgetary support necessary to perform its mission. States that seek to limit or otherwise undermine the objective work of ODIHR call their commitment to democratic principles of government into serious question.

Elections genuinely reflecting the will of the people are essential for a healthy, functioning democracy. We are encouraged by the efforts made in some OSCE participating States to improve election practices.

Since HDIM 2013, there have been many elections in the OSCE region. The United States welcomed the May 25 presidential election in **Ukraine**, which succeeded despite the challenges posed by external aggression, an uncertain political and economic environment, and an abbreviated time frame. The misuse of state resources, a problem which had plagued many previous Ukrainian elections, was significantly ameliorated. We commend ODIHR's ability to mobilize an extraordinary election observation mission – its largest ever - in Ukraine.

In Russian-occupied Crimea, as well as conflict areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, violence and intimidation prevented many from voting in the Ukrainian presidential election. Still, a remarkable number of voters displayed great courage in casting their ballots. As we salute these brave voters, we also commend the Ukrainian authorities for upholding their OSCE election commitments and respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the elections process. Ukrainian authorities and the people of Ukraine rose to the historic opportunity to take an important step in building a united, independent, democratic state based on the rule of law. We continue to support the Government of Ukraine and the OSCE monitoring effort as Ukraine prepares for its parliamentary elections on October 26.

We were disappointed that the **Russian Federation** did not use its influence to forestall the illegal referenda held in Crimea in March and in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in May. And we reiterate that we do not recognize the legitimacy of the so-called regional and local elections held in Crimea on September 14. We will not acknowledge their outcome. Our position on Crimea remains clear: The peninsula remains an integral part of Ukraine.

As for the Russian Federation itself, we regret that in the regional and local elections this month the candidate registration process was used to squeeze out opposition candidates from running.

While regretting that Kosovo is denied a seat at this table, the United States commends **Kosovo** for holding local elections in late 2013 and parliamentary elections in June. Intimidation and violence in northern Kosovo challenged but did not block the democratic process, and the people living there exercised their right to vote in genuine elections to choose representatives for the first time in years. We appreciate the commitment of both the Governments of Kosovo and **Serbia** to encourage voter participation. We appreciate the prompt response of Kosovo election officials to sporadic reports of irregularities and alleged electoral manipulation. And we appreciate the hard work by EULEX, KFOR, and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo to ensure that all eligible voters could cast their votes in a safe and secure election. Most importantly, we congratulate Kosovo's citizens as their young country continues to advance its democratic development and European aspirations.

In **Tajikistan**, we agree with the OSCE observation mission's assessment that the November 2013 presidential election "took place peacefully, but restrictive candidate registration requirements resulted in a lack of genuine choice and meaningful pluralism." Although the Tajik government took some measures to enhance the transparency and efficiency of the administration of the election, observers noted significant shortcomings on Election Day, including widespread proxy voting, group voting, and ballot box stuffing. There also appears to have been a pattern of harassment and attacks against members of the political opposition and opposition campaign workers.

We welcomed the invitation from **Turkmenistan** that resulted in an OSCE Election Assessment Mission for the December 2013 parliamentary election and, for the first time, a final report assessing the electoral process. We agree with the report's findings that the elections "took place in a strictly controlled political environment characterized by a lack of respect for fundamental freedoms that are central to democratic elections." While a second political party took part in these elections and a third one is currently being established, these new parties do not present true alternative choices. We strongly urge Turkmenistan to work with ODIHR to improve the climate and framework for the conduct of elections. The United States hopes that the OSCE will be able to conduct a full election monitoring mission the next time Turkmenistan holds national elections.

We share the concern that has been raised in several OSCE observation reports regarding the blurring of state and party in the context of elections. In **Macedonia's** presidential and parliamentary elections in April, the campaign period was overshadowed by numerous and persistent allegations from across the country of biased media coverage that was largely in favor of one ruling party and its presidential candidate. There were also allegations of voter intimidation and pressure by state authorities in cooperation with political parties, including threats to voters' state employment and intimidation of small business owners. The opposite also reportedly occurred: voters were promised state employment in exchange for voting for particular candidates.

In **Hungary**, 25 years after the historic transition from a one-party state, it is particularly striking that OSCE election observers concluded in their report on the April 2014 elections that: "[t]he main governing party enjoyed undue advantage because of restrictive campaign

regulations, biased media coverage and campaign activities that blurred the separation between political party and the state.”

We note that the candidates in **Turkey**’s first direct popular election of its president were generally able to campaign freely and that the freedoms of association and peaceful assembly were respected. However, the OSCE/ODIHR final report noted that the Prime Minister’s use of his official resources and biased media coverage gave him a distinct advantage over the other candidates.

The United States thanks ODIHR and the OSCE PA for their expert efforts to ensure that election-related commitments are met by offering recommendations to improve the electoral process in the participating States. We support ODIHR’s outreach to local election officials in our country. We will continue to support observation of United States’ elections and to carefully consider ODIHR’s recommendations regarding electoral processes in the United States.