

THE OSCE/ODIHR 2011 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working session 8 - Implementation of the OSCE commitments on elections
(Friday 30 September 2011)

“Electoral observers in Poland”

The Polish Forum of Young Diplomats
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Implementation of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendation from monitoring Polish pre-term parliamentary elections in 2007.

In 2007 Poland hosted the first OSCE/ODIHR electoral mission – the Election Assessment Mission. In effect as usual a number of recommendations were formulated and areas of possible improvements identified in the finale report. Among them the mission noticed that the electoral law does not provide possibility both for international and domestic non-partisan observation. It is in clear contradiction with the Article 8 of the Copenhagen Document.

In this respect the new Election Code adopted in January 2011 in fact marks significant progress as a number of the recommendations were addressed in the bill. Nevertheless not all the problems were solved in full extend. Truly the rights of the international observers were granted in the Code but non-partisan domestic observers and local nongovernmental organizations seem to be again ignored.

To say it straight on, the local groups yet do not have rights to observe so elementary issues like voting or counting procedures. Moreover, we are in situation where elections in Poland can be observed by nongovernmental organizations from 195 states with exception of organizations form one state – from Poland itself. In my opinion the regulation is discriminative.

In this circumstance the Polish Forum of Young Diplomats recently established a new permanent Program – “The Young Election Observers” and I myself explored ways how the situation could be changed.

All that not necessary because we doubt in integrity of electoral processes in Poland - which are on high standards, but to use the observations as a tool in enhancing interest of the young people in democratic process in general.

Election observation programs seem to be ideal for this aim for many reasons:

- a) Bear invaluable educational aspect – to asses any process for example votes counting first you must to learn in details its procedures and to know at last as many as the observed
- b) Possibility to see on own eyes how ‘democracy becomes’ during the electoral night and thus extend interest in the process and filling that we all own the process
- c) Preventive aspect
- d) And finally informative aspect – it brings information on quality of the process

But let me go back to the problem. After a well thought out decision in February 2011 I decided to direct to the Senate Marshal a formal petition. The petition highlighted the problem of equality (or rather inequality) amongst the non-governmental organizations. I postulated changes in Election Code to make lastly observation by domestic non-partisan groups possible also in Poland as it was promised in our OSCE commitments.

The petition was formally accepted and passed to the Chair of the Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Petitions Committee. The Committee can dismiss the postulate or can start to work on the issues and subsequently take legislative action to correct the Election Code. We hope that our petition will be considered shortly after election to the Polish Parliament scheduled on the next week.

If all that goes well, Poland will finally have a chance to join (as Norway and Great Britain did recently) the OSCE member states where Article 8 of the Copenhagen Document is no longer a problem.

Then I myself and my colleges from the Polish Forum of Young Diplomats could start to work to use the freshly acquired space of social freedom to build a more aware and vibrant civil society in Poland.

Note about the Polish Forum of Young Diplomats:

The Polish Forum of Young Diplomats is an organization of students and graduates of a number of universities from all over the World and particularly Poland. We have defined our careers and common ambitions to be part of the Foreign Service of the Republic of Poland and a stakeholder on international relations stage. The vast majority of over 100 NGO members are already experienced civic campaigners and working for home and international non-governmental organizations as well as state and international institutions. PFYD was created in 2002.

Mission of the association:

Creating and educating future Leaders who, by their activities, will ensure the strong and stable position of Poland in the arena of international politics.

The Polish Forum of Young Diplomats has a partnership status with the Council of Europe and is a member of the “Group Abroad” gathering over 30 of the most active Polish NGOs working abroad, and of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.

The website: www.diplomacy.pl