



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Session 15 Democratic Institutions including Democratic Elections**

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Avis T. Bohlen  
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Warsaw, October 3, 2012

The conduct of democratic elections requires not only transparent management of polling, but also an open pre-election environment in which citizens can participate fully, political parties can compete freely, independent media can operate, and an independent and impartial judicial system can function in a fair, transparent and effective manner. A review of election commitments must, then, consider all of these issues.

The United States values the efforts of the OSCE to develop capacity among OSCE participating and partner States to implement OSCE and international commitments with respect to elections, and to effectively manage international observation in the OSCE region. Both the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly contribute to these endeavors and to fostering widespread respect for OSCE's role in promoting democratic elections.

The United States commends the OSCE and its Mission in Kosovo, supported by other OSCE Missions in the region, for successfully facilitating the participation of Kosovo Serbs in Serbia's presidential and parliamentary elections earlier this year without infringing on Kosovo's sovereignty. Serbia conducted those elections in a free, fair and transparent manner, and Belgrade and Pristina both recognized – despite their other differences – the needs and rights of voters. The OSCE's assistance was a reminder of what the organization can do in the field, an accomplishment that should be emulated and expanded to other troubled areas of the OSCE region.

We welcome the recent adoption of a new electoral code in Albania, and encourage both the authorities and stakeholders in that country to respect and implement the code. If Albania's 2013 Parliamentary elections are to meet international and OSCE commitments, all parties must commit to transparency and to playing by the rules established by the legislature.

Unfortunately, there have been too many recent elections in the OSCE region in which electoral commissions showed bias in favor of governing parties and incumbent leaders, access by opposition candidates to the media was limited or non-existent, and opposition candidates or parties were harassed and/or intimidated. Some elections have seen citizen participation subverted by disenfranchisement, inaccurate voter registries, or barriers to observing electoral

processes. In some countries, genuine opposition parties or candidates simply do not have a chance to emerge. This fundamentally undermines the purpose of an election – the free and fair expression of the will of the people – notwithstanding the smooth technical management of an election day.

We commend the Russian people for their serious, sustained, and peaceful activism in defense of their right to select their own government. Nevertheless, we regret that both the Duma and Presidential elections were marred by widespread and credible allegations of fraud. We urge the Russian Federation to implement the democratic principles to which it has subscribed, including equal access to media and freedom of citizens to seek, receive and impart information about elections through the activities of citizen election monitoring organizations. In addition, citizens must be permitted to exercise their freedom of assembly in support of, or in opposition to, any candidate or issue.

The United States congratulates the citizens of Georgia on their historic parliamentary elections October 1. While the final count and appeals are still ongoing, we support the assessment of the OSCE/ODIHR election observers that the Georgian people have freely expressed their will at the ballot box. We urge all parties to work together constructively in the new parliament to advance Georgia's democratic and economic development. We look forward to working with the new parliament as well as the cabinet and president of Georgia to further expand our already strong bilateral relationship.

This coming Sunday, October 7, Bosnia-Herzegovina will hold local elections. My delegation is concerned that officials of Republika Srpska may be targeting non-Serb voters in an attempt to discourage or prevent their full participation in these elections in Srebrenica municipality. Obviously, given the genocide which occurred in Srebrenica in 1995, attempts to intimidate or prevent duly registered voters from exercising their rights on election day are particularly egregious, and we call on Republika Srpska officials to respect the rights of all voters on October 7.

Whereas Ukraine's last four national elections have received positive assessments from the OSCE election missions, we remain deeply concerned about the politically motivated prosecutions of opposition leaders Yuliya Tymoshenko and Yuri Lutsenko and their prohibition from participating in the October 28 parliamentary elections, which limits the scope of choices presented to the Ukrainian people. We also remain concerned about reports of violations of campaign rules and about limitations imposed on independent media.

The recent Belarusian elections failed to meet international obligations and OSCE commitments. Leading prospective opposition candidates were denied registration and the democratic opposition was almost completely excluded from election commissions. The Lukashenka regime continued to stifle dissent and to limit opposition to its rule by harassing, intimidating, and detaining democratic activists and independent journalists. In the short time since the elections, the government of Belarus has also announced that it will not work with the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur. We urge the government of Belarus to release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, facilitate the work of the UN Special Rapporteur, and allow the people of Belarus to voice their opinions in free and fair elections.

As we look forward to upcoming elections in the region, including the 2013 presidential elections in Tajikistan, we stress the importance of promoting democratization and ensuring transparent presidential elections consistent with OSCE standards. The Tajik government's continued campaign against religious voices indicates a government attempt to neutralize the political opposition and to consolidate power. Democratic elections come with varying and dissenting political views and voices that must not be stifled or limited. In the same vein, we continue to be concerned by restrictions on the press and imposed censorship on independent media, which play a critical role in democratic elections.

The United States will also hold Presidential and Congressional elections this November 6. We are pleased to welcome an OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission with Long Term Observers. LTOs will begin deployment in 40 states across the country on October 13. We look forward to ODIHR's assessment of our elections.

Thank you.