

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

**Warsaw, 2-13 October 2006**

**Working Session 10: 'Democratic Institutions'**

**Contribution of the Council of Europe**

**Parliamentary Assembly and Election Observation**

Since 1989 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has been engaged in election observation in Europe. Normally, the Parliamentary Assembly observes parliamentary and presidential elections. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) observes elections at local and regional levels. The Venice Commission provides election assistance to certain member and applicant states on issues related to electoral legislation.

In recent years the Parliamentary Assembly has observed more than a hundred parliamentary and presidential elections as well as referenda in Council of Europe member states and applicant countries whose parliaments enjoy or have applied for special guest status. Assembly delegations also took part in the observation of elections in Chile in December 1989 and in Palestine in January 1996. In September 2004 the Assembly observed parliamentary elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan whose Parliament signed a cooperation accord with PACE earlier in the year; in December 2005 PACE observed parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan. In 2005-2006 PACE also observed elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, as well as to the Presidency of the Palestinian Authority.; in 2006 PACE observed parliamentary and presidential elections in Mexico. In 2006 alone, PACE observed six elections and one referendum (Montenegro), also dispatching pre-electoral missions, as appropriate.

Ad hoc Parliamentary Assembly delegations always conduct election observation missions within a broader context of examining membership applications or monitoring member states' compliance with obligations and commitments. Parliamentary observers have extensive first-hand experience of the workings of democracy and are therefore able to give an accurate political appraisal of elections. Reports of Ad-hoc committees are debated on opening days of Assembly sessions as part of the Progress Report of the Bureau of the Assembly.

The aim of election observation is to determine whether a country is on course for membership or, in case of Council of Europe member States, whether it is honouring its obligations and commitments.

Election observation is not just confined to the observation of actual voting – it starts well ahead of the polls. Run up to the elections, in particular treatment of the media and Non-governmental organisations as well as fair play by the authorities vis-à-vis them are put to scrutiny. Normally, this is done on the basis of documents from the Council of Europe field offices or partner organisations. Increasingly, and when the situation so warrants, pre-electoral missions are dispatched. The goal is to identify problems well ahead of the election day so as to allow time for the authorities concerned to take corrective action. Pre-electoral delegations are composed of one representative per each political group of the Assembly (currently five) which makes them a representative cross-section of the entire Assembly.

Then, when an Ad hoc Committee arrives in its full composition for actual election observation, it checks with the authorities concerned what corrective action had been put in place.

On election day, observation starts far before actual voting. Our observers check if polling stations are opened on time and if all the stipulated legal procedures have been complied with.

The conduct of the vote is subject of a detailed scrutiny and the closing of a polling station does not signify the end of observation. In fact, observers stay at polling stations to see how the counting is done.

Sometimes, when elections were particularly problematic, a post electoral mission is dispatched to see how criticisms in the election observation report were acted upon.

With regard to relations with other international institutions, the Parliamentary Assembly has always collaborated in the field with the ODIHR, the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE and European Parliament delegations. Close cooperation has been developed between the delegations of parliamentary observers from the PACE, the OSCE Assembly and the European Parliament, as well as ODIHR with the aim of co-ordinating political positions on elections.

In the context of seeking to foreclose any forum shopping by a country observed, the concept of an international election observation mission (IEOM) comprising individual parliamentary delegations and the OSCE election observation missions has evolved. Thus, election observation is increasingly becoming a cooperative joint endeavour by PACE, OSCE PA, EP and ODIHR EOM. Of late, NATO Assembly has become a de-facto new member of an enlarged IEOM.

Assembly delegations also co-operate with national delegations to PACE, international and national non-governmental organisations specialized in election observations and organise consultations with media representatives and religious and cultural figures.

The Parliamentary Assembly delegations pay more attention to the broader political aspects of the electoral process, rather than to the technical conduct of elections.

PACE endorsed, in the fall of 2005, the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, elaborated jointly by the United Nations, the NDI and the Carter center in consultation with major players in the election observation community; it participated in the ensuing commemorating ceremony at the UN Headquarters in New York and contributed to a follow-up meeting at London in June 2006. Thus, increasingly, the interplay of the world election observer community is getting more structured.

With a view to taking stock of results achieved thus far and identifying new avenues of cooperation in election observation, PACE will organise an International Conference of the Parliamentary Dimension of Election Observation. The Conference will be held in Strasbourg in mid-February 2007 and we are looking forward to a thought inspiring debate.

For further information please contact:

Mr Vladimir Dronov  
Head of Department  
Senior Advisor to the President of the Assembly  
Interparliamentary Cooperation  
Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly  
Council of Europe  
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex  
Tel: +33 3 88 41 27 09  
Fax +33 3 88 41 27 76  
Email: [vladimir.dronov@coe.int](mailto:vladimir.dronov@coe.int)