



# Afghanistan votes

The OSCE breaks new ground in a partner country

Billboards showing presidential candidates Massouda Jalal and Hamid Karzai in Kabul's Karteh Parwan district  
Photo: Alexander Nitzsche

**BY ROBERT L. BARRY**

**O**n election day, 9 October 2004, the long drought in Afghanistan broke. Millions of voters waited patiently in rain and snow to cast their votes in the first-ever election for a Head of State. In Herat, hundreds of women barged into a polling station when its opening was delayed, much to the amusement of the police standing guard.

More than eight million Afghans — nearly three-quarters of the eligible voters — came out to cast their ballot despite threats to their lives by Taliban remnants and al-Qaeda. These were not empty threats, as evidenced by sporadic election-related violence all over the country, the discovery of caches of explosives and weapons on the eve of the polls and the kidnapping of three United Nations election personnel which could have easily ended tragically.

Thankfully, on election day itself, an extraordinary effort by the Afghan National Army, intelligence service and police, supported by NATO's International Security Assistance Force and the U.S.-led Coalition Forces Command, created a

secure environment.

The OSCE broke new ground in Afghanistan. For the first time, it deployed an election team to one of its ten Partners for Co-operation. The concept of hands-on election support was new, and obviously the unpredictable security environment posed serious challenges. The entire process of registering voters and preparing for elections in a war-torn country with a weak infrastructure was both dangerous and complex.

It was an emotional moment for Afghans, and it was gratifying to all of us who took part in this historic event that the OSCE figured prominently in its success. This was the view of President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan transitional Government, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the OSCE Permanent Council. In his letter of 15 November, the outgoing U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, also commended the “extraordinary contribution” of the OSCE's Election Support Team (EST).

## **CO-OPERATIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Devising a new concept of mission opera-

tions had proved important since many experienced election observers were more comfortable with the kind of detailed, arm's-length scrutiny usual in observation missions of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The concept paper described the task as "a co-operative technical assistance mission", where the OSCE's constructive advice is actively sought and given.

Team members were encouraged to point out serious problems as they occurred and to make suggestions as to how to correct them. In drawing up recommendations, the Support Team concentrated on the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in the spring of 2005. The OSCE teams were invited to work closely with their European Union counterparts, just as I worked closely with Richard Chambers, head of the EU election support team, and Francesc Vendrell, special representative of the EU in Afghanistan.

As expected, given the volatile security situation, the deployment plan shifted frequently depending on events and the ability of Global Risk Strategies, the OSCE's contracted security firm, to provide logistical support.

In the end, four two-person teams were assigned to Kabul, each with a distinct functional focus. Two-person teams were deployed to the regional centres of Bamyan, Gardez, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar, and to the provincial capital, Fayzabad. Two two-person teams were assigned to the regional centres of Kunduz and Mazar-i-Sharif. Most teams paired a man and a woman. On election day, EU and OSCE teams often merged so that we could send two-person female teams into polling stations for women.

#### ELECTION ISSUES

Immediately on arrival in the field, team members began meeting with party and candidate representatives, election administrators and domestic election monitors and human rights groups. While the OSCE's Election Support Team was a latecomer to the scene compared with the EU, we were able to orient ourselves quickly, thanks to the experience of our teams and the help provided by the EU, the UN and the election administrators — the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) and its secretariat.

Although there was much uncharted territory in a country which had never before elected a Head of State, and where the majority of voters were illiterate and had

only the vaguest notion of the meaning of democracy, a surprisingly high number of issues were familiar to us, since we had previously encountered them in elections in countries in transition:

- **Intimidation and secrecy of the vote.**

Typically, candidates and their agents fuelled rumours that voters' choices could not be kept secret. Coupled with threats of retaliation by warlords and tribal leaders, this caused widespread concern. As a result, counting was centralized in eight counting centres around the country instead of being handled at the voting centres or at the provincial level.

- **Advantage of incumbency.** Hamid Karzai, who had been selected President by the emergency Loya Jirga in 2002 with the support of the United States and others, used his incumbency in ways criticized by his rivals, for example, by inaugurating aid projects financed by the international community during the month-long campaign period.

- **Impartiality of the election authority.** The incumbent's rivals were highly critical of the supposed pro-Karzai stance of the JEMB and its secretariat, whose Afghan members were appointed by the President — though on the basis of recommendations by UNAMA, which had been widely discussed in advance with interested parties.

- **Multiple voting.** During voter registration, it was clear that many Afghans had acquired more than one "voter card", the identification which, in the absence of a voter register, had to be presented by voters at polling stations. Although these multi-

UN voter education posters illustrating the voting procedure, including the finger-inking to avoid multiple voting (far right)







Voting on 9 October 2004 was relatively peaceful. Photos: Alexandre Marion, Stephanie Bleeker, Brian Steers

ple cards appeared to have been obtained by voters for various purposes, there was widespread suspicion that multiple voting would be orchestrated. The use of indelible ink had been advertised as “the last line of defence” against this scenario. This background set the stage for the election-day controversy revolving around the ink that was used in some polling centres.

- **Vote count.** Although the idea behind centralizing the vote count in eight centres was to protect the secrecy of the vote, it also created vulnerabilities regarding the transport of the ballots from polling stations to the centres and the security of the centres. In some cases, election materials had to be moved by donkey, which took up to five days in each direction.

- **Complaints and appeals.** In Afghanistan, the sword remains mightier than the pen, and there is no tradition to support the formal complaints procedures typical in OSCE participating States. The Election Support Team concluded at an early stage that procedures established to investigate complaints were inadequate, especially on election day.

- **Election administration.** To staff 22,000 polling stations, it was necessary to recruit and train more than 140,000 election workers, who took on significant personal risk, particularly where the Taliban or local warlords hostile to President Karzai’s candidacy held sway. Many candidates doubted the impartiality of election workers recruited by local community leaders (or “commanders”).

Faced with these concerns, the Election Support Team set out to reassure the candidates and their supporters that the polling process was designed to protect the interests of all. To this end, I gave a number of press interviews and statements stressing that the secrecy of the ballot was protected and that safeguards concerning the integrity of the process were in place. Kabul-based expert teams began sitting in on meetings of the JEMB and collecting information about complaints and appeals and how they were being dealt with.

#### ELECTION DAY

On the eve of elections, 8 October, reports were spreading that the Taliban and al-Qaeda were preparing to disrupt the election through suicide attacks, assaults on polling stations and the like. As the OSCE mandate did not require detailed monitoring in polling places, Support Team experts were instructed to begin visiting polling stations only after 9 a.m., by which time the developing security situation would have become clearer.

It was soon evident that voting around the country was taking place in an orderly, peaceful manner, with both men and women eager to have their say and patiently waiting in lines of sometimes up to more than a thousand people. In most polling places, OSCE experts and other monitors were hospitably welcomed by voters and administrators, who were obviously proud of their accomplishment in carrying out the first election of a national leader.

Team members saw little evidence of partisanship or intimidation; to most Afghans, the very act of voting seemed more important than who was elected. To the question of what results they wanted from the election, a frequent answer was “an end to the rule of the gun” and a curbing of the power of local “commanders” and militias.

The first signs of trouble came at mid-morning on 9 October, when the Joint Electoral Management Body and the OSCE heard reports that the indelible ink, which was designed to be the “last line of defence” against multiple voting, was

easy to remove in some locations. Hamid Karzai's rivals quickly mounted a call to boycott the election. In practice, this meant that they were asking for the election to be annulled and held all over again.

In the face of mounting — if greatly exaggerated — reports in the international media about “chaos”, Jean Arnault, UNAMA head, called a crisis meeting to decide how to react. The OSCE and the EU offered their advice, which was that calls for annulling the election were unjustifiable and that, instead, the opposition candidates should be offered a credible forum in which their complaints would be investigated. This decision was announced by the JEMB that same afternoon, while the polls were still open. There was no noticeable decline in voter turnout in response to the “boycott” call.

After the polls closed, it became apparent that Hamid Karzai's rivals were considering whether to refuse to recognize the election results and to call on their supporters to take to the streets — a disturbing possibility. It was clear that the ink problem and other irregularities on election day had not resulted from efforts at political manipulation, nor was it likely that they could have had a significant impact on the outcome.

Although the mandate of the Election Support Team did not foresee a pronouncement on whether the elections measured up to international standards, I was encouraged by the OSCE Secretary General and the Chairman-in-Office to play an active role in situations like this. At 11 a.m., on 10 October, I appeared at the Kabul Media Centre to issue a statement describing the call to nullify the election as completely unjustified and urging the candidates to make use of the “thorough and transparent” investigation process offered by the JEMB and UNAMA.

In my statement and at the press conference that followed, I stressed that, “9 October was an historic day in Afghanistan, and the millions who came to the polls clearly wanted to turn from the rule of the gun to the rule of law. If their aspirations are to be met, disputes about the validity of election results should be dealt with as the law provides”.

The OSCE statement was followed by a similar one on 11 October by the EU special representative, Francesc Vendrell. But because the OSCE statement came at the beginning of the news cycle on 10 October, at a time when the success of the election appeared to be hanging in the balance, it dominated the news inside and outside

Afghanistan and affected the actions of Hamid Karzai's rivals.

As the statement said, the OSCE was not validating the election results (obviously, the vote count had not yet begun) nor passing judgment on the merits of the complaints. Certainly there were irregularities, including but not limited to the issue of indelible ink. These should be investigated, and conclusions should be based on the facts as determined by the investigators.

On 11 October, the Election Support Team and others began consulting with the 14 candidates and their representatives who had called for the annulment of the election. It quickly became apparent to most of them that the ink issue alone did not provide a basis for their demands that the election be annulled.

The candidates' attention shifted to other issues, such as voter access to the polls, bias and intimidation of voters, ballot-box stuffing, multiple voting, under-aged voting and issues related to the count and the security of ballot boxes after the polls closed. Most of the leading candidates indicated their willingness to participate in the investigation proposed by the JEMB.

The OSCE Election Support Team and the EU joined UNAMA and the JEMB in discussions on how to organize an investigation that would be acceptable to all candidates. On 11 October, the JEMB appointed an impartial panel of election experts recommended by UNAMA to investigate complaints relating to election day and to draw up recommendations on ways of resolving those complaints.

The panel, consisting of Craig Jenness (Canada), Staffan Darnolf (Sweden) and David Mathieson (UK), undertook a thorough and transparent review of all the complaints within its mandate, and submitted a report and recommendations to the JEMB on 31 October. The central conclusion



Ambassador Barry briefs the press at the UN premises in Kabul.  
Photo: Alexander Nitzsche



Ballot boxes are collected, packed and dispatched to counting centres.  
Photos: Brian Steers, Jared Hays

of the report was:

“This was a commendable election, particularly given the very challenging circumstances. There were shortcomings, many of which were raised by the candidates themselves. These problems deserved to be considered, to ensure the will of the voters was properly reflected, and to help shape improvements for future elections. But they could not have materially affected the overall result.”

This finding was fully consistent with the preliminary views of the OSCE Election Support Team.

On 3 November, after considering the report of the impartial panel, the JEMB certified Hamid Karzai as the winner of the election with a little over 55 per cent of the vote. Four other candidates, all tied to minority ethnic groups and to irregular militias, garnered more than 10 per cent each.

In the wake of the JEMB certification, most of the candidates grudgingly accepted the verdict of the independent panel of experts, while still insisting that the JEMB was not an impartial body. Due to the investigative process, the announcement of the results was delayed for a few days, but the threat that substantial elements of the population would not accept the legitimacy of the elections was averted. The OSCE Election Support Team and the EU played an important role in achieving this end.

In my experience as the head of previous OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions, the host government and the election

authority are usually not sorry to see us leave. Although they may appreciate the cooperation of ODIHR experts between election cycles, the conclusions and recommendations normally provided at the mission's conclusion are less welcome, especially since they sometimes validate complaints made by the opposition.

In contrast, farewell calls made by the Election Support Team on 18 October were uniformly positive. Our comment that parliamentary elections could be held in spring if decisions were made promptly was particularly welcome, not necessarily because it was thought the new government would choose to begin its term by deciding on difficult issues, but because the recommendations highlighted what exactly had to be done. The invitation to the OSCE to continue to contribute to the process of democracy-building and elections was universal and heartfelt.

I have been involved with the OSCE in one capacity or another since the Stockholm Conference of 1984-1985. In my opinion, never has the Organization so vividly displayed its flexibility, innovativeness and ability to respond effectively to new challenges as in Afghanistan.

#### **“ACTIVIST” APPROACH**

The contribution that the OSCE was able to make to Afghanistan's first presidential election was not exactly what Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah or the United Nations Assistance Mission had in mind when an invitation to “observe” was extended to the Organization on 6 July 2004.

A traditional OSCE/ODIHR observation mission involves several weeks of work by a few long-term observers, followed by enough short-term observers to cover a statistically significant number of polling places on election day. More important, it is an arm's-length relationship, in which observers must avoid any involvement in the process, beyond concluding whether or not international standards have been met.

An initial assessment visit to the country, from 11 to 14 July, led to the decision that “observation” in the usual sense of the word was not practical, for security and logistical reasons. In addition, as Afghanistan was not an OSCE participating State, it could not be held to the election standards as set forth in the OSCE Copenhagen Document of 1990.

The OSCE Permanent Council's Decision No. 622 of 29 July 2004 assigned the Election Support Team the task



of analysing the electoral process in Afghanistan and recommending suitable electoral and legislative improvements in advance of parliamentary, provincial and local elections in 2005. The Team was asked to pay particular attention to voter registration, the performance of electoral commissions, vote count and tabulation, as well as the complaint and appeals process.

For this purpose, the Permanent Council approved a team of up to 50 election experts for a period of up to 45 days.

Also invited to observe, the European Union, too, decided independently to field a Democracy and Election Support Mission of a similar size. Neither the OSCE nor the EU mission, or teams fielded by Russia, Japan and various international NGOs, could make any pretence of providing a large-scale presence on election day. At the same time, however, the more flexible mandates of the OSCE and the EU, coupled with invitations from the Afghan authorities and the UN to provide advice during the election process, gave both organizations a more active role to play than would have been the case with normal "observation".

Prior to the arrival of the Election Support Team's advance party on 15 September, there was a second assessment mission and a visit by OSCE Secretary General Ján Kubiš and the Director of his Office, Didier Fau. The aim was to nail down security arrangements and reach the necessary agreements with international military commands and the election authorities.

A key decision was to contract a private security company with an extensive presence in Afghanistan, Global Risk Strategies (GRS), to handle logistics and security matters. A GRS representative was to be with every team deployed at all times to advise on security issues, arrange for transport and interpreters and provide secure lodging.

A second key decision was to formally vest the Head of Mission with full responsibility for decisions on deployment of OSCE personnel in the field. The Secretary General and the OSCE Chairman-in-Office made it imperative that safety and security were to be the main considerations in carrying out the mission.

To ensure that the best possible advice was available to the Head of Mission, the OSCE's Senior Security Co-ordinator, Declan Greenway, was assigned as Deputy Head of Mission for Security. Graham Elson, an experienced election administrator and observer from the United Kingdom, was Deputy Head of Mission for Elections.



Members of the OSCE Election Support Team get their communications and security gear ready.

Photos: Viktor Kryshevich, Brian Steers



## TEAM DEPLOYMENT

In preparation for a core team deployment on 26 September, an advance party headed by Project Manager Mark Etherington and Operations Co-ordinator Philip Hatton arrived in Kabul on 15 September. Immediately after heading the election mission to observe Kazakhstan's parliamentary elections of 19 September, I rushed to Vienna for consultations on 22 September.

The UNAMA and most OSCE participating States advocated an activist approach to the mission, with a contingent as close as possible to the 50 authorized by the Permanent Council. Despite the short notice and the hazards inherent in the mission, participating States responded by seconding several dozen volunteers, most of whom had extensive experience in election administration and monitoring, often in dangerous environments. Almost half of the volunteers were women.

A core team of 14 was joined by 28 secondees, who arrived in Kabul on 29 September. Our immediate challenge on arrival was to ensure adequate security, develop a mission concept, decide on a deployment plan, and brief and deploy the teams of experts.

It had been clear from the first assessment visit that the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul could be made secure only if adequate perimeter security were provided by the Afghan National Army and the Ministry of the Interior. Despite frequent assurances, as of 27 September, perimeter security was still inadequate. We explained to the



Shqipe Habibi from Kosovo, part of the UN election team, supervises the counting and registration of ballot boxes. A few days after this photo was taken, she and two colleagues were kidnapped by a militant Afghan group and released four weeks later.  
Photo: Olivier d'Auzon

Afghan authorities that unless steps were taken to resolve the problem, the OSCE teams' scheduled arrival on 29 September would be cancelled.

On 28 September, a strong security force arrived on the scene, headed by an Afghan general who remained responsive to OSCE requests.

#### **PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: THE WAY AHEAD**

As a latecomer to the scene, the OSCE Election Support Team saw its niche in a close review of improvements in process and legislation required before the parliamentary elections, notionally scheduled for April-May of 2005. Most observers agreed that these elections would be more contentious and more difficult to stage than the presidential elections, and most election experts felt that it would be impossible to meet the spring timeline.

The Support Team set out to examine these assumptions through meetings around the country with political actors, election administrators, international military forces and others. On 18 October, the Team presented its recommendations to Foreign Minister Abdullah, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Jean Arnault, and the Joint Electoral Management Body and its secretariat.

The Support Team commended the conduct of the elections, while observing that shortcomings had been organizational in nature rather than being matters of pre-meditated dishonesty. However, it stressed that political will would have to be dem-

onstrated by President Karzai and his new Government if the necessary practical steps were to be taken that would permit holding parliamentary, and possibly local, elections in the spring of 2005.

As our report says, "inaction will make postponement of parliamentary elections inevitable". The "road map" accompanying the report points to basic decisions concerning the method of election, the election administration's structure, and a new, improved plan for voter education that must be made 180 days in advance of election day — in other words, *immediately*.

Along with other international election experts, the OSCE Election Support Team believed that the system planned for parliamentary elections — the single non-transferable vote system — was neither practical nor appropriate. The Team recommended a hybrid system in which a portion of the legislature would be elected from party lists for a single nation-wide constituency, while the remainder would be elected from multi-member constituencies. Similar systems exist in many other transitional societies.

Because the parliamentary elections will affect the power base of ethnic leaders and warlords, they will inevitably be more hotly contested than the presidential elections. Consequently, there must be increased emphasis on achieving disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and on enhancing the capabilities of the police and the Afghan National Army.

As the Election Support Team's report emphasizes, before parliamentary elections are undertaken, there must be a complete overhaul of the JEMB and its secretariat and an expansion of the system of electoral commissions down to the provincial level. The system for dealing with complaints and appeals must also be fundamentally strengthened. The OSCE *can* and *should* play a role in these capacity-building efforts.

In most cases, the Team's recommendations complement and reinforce those of the EU support mission and the impartial panel established by UNAMA. There is every reason for the UN, the EU and the OSCE to work together on these issues in the future.

**Ambassador Robert L. Barry was Head of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina from January 1998 to June 2001. Prior to his role in Afghanistan, he either led or participated in OSCE/ODIHR observation missions to Serbia and Montenegro, Armenia, Albania, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. He was also part of the Carter Centre's delegation that observed the presidential elections in Indonesia in July. He has had a long career with the U.S. Government, including as Ambassador to the Stockholm Conference on Disarmament in Europe and as co-ordinator of U.S. assistance programmes for Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union. He also served as Ambassador to Bulgaria and Indonesia, as well as Deputy Director of the Voice of America.**



AFGHANISTAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2004

# Kabul revisited

## More than just the “ink issue”

BY ALEXANDER NITZSCHE

Ever since my first visit to Kabul, lasting barely 24 hours, I had always been on the lookout for an ideal opportunity to go back for a longer stay. A little more than a year ago, I was part of a delegation that travelled through several Central Asian countries with Dutch Foreign Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office in 2003 and now NATO Secretary General. On a side trip to Afghanistan, the Minister met President Hamid Karzai and dropped in on the Dutch troops at “Camp Warehouse” outside Kabul.

Two things stand out vividly from my introduction to Kabul: the gut-wrenching nose-dive performed by the German Transall transport plane, simultaneously releasing a series of anti-missile flares with a deafening bang, and the dusty brown-yellow colour enveloping the landscape in the wake of another sandstorm.

My next flight to Kabul, on 28 September 2004, in a civilian United Nations Humanitarian Air Service plane, was far less spectacular, including the simple sandwiches that were handed out. But Kabul’s dust was still there, and so was the overwhelming

feeling of nervousness and curiosity I had felt more than a year earlier.

This time, I came with a 42-member OSCE team that had been sent by the Organization’s participating States to assist Afghanistan in its first-ever presidential election and to put together recommendations for the parliamentary polls scheduled in spring 2005.

We all had taken part in several election observation missions. Some of us were armed with special credentials, earned from previous lengthy assignments in the region. Several spoke Dari or Pashtu, or both — the languages spoken by the majority of Afghans.

My task was to take care of the information needs of journalists, which I knew was going to be demanding, considering the keen interest of the international media in the Afghan polls. They were the main event on the global news agenda, it seemed to me, immediately before the U.S. elections.

I also came with another brief. In September 2003, my wife, Georgina, had spent two weeks in Kabul for an Austrian NGO to set up a grassroots initiative to convey to Afghan women an understanding of democratic principles, especially the concept behind elections. My suitcase was crammed with training manuals and audio cassettes for distribution to local NGOs. The project was modest, but feedback from the training seminars was heartening: The women of Afghanistan were raring to vote.

The security situation was a matter of serious concern to us all. We had been asked to keep our heads down, and our freedom of movement was highly restricted. We were ordered not to venture out alone in the city and after dark. The car-bomb suicide attack against a U.S.-run security company in Kabul was much discussed over dinner at the Hotel Intercontinental, where we were staying.

The first few days were spent in briefings, briefings, and, to wrap up the day, some more briefings. On the third day, flak jackets, helmets and communications gear were handed out. Reports by the field teams from the regional centres via the satellite equipment were to be received at the “base camp”, a room on the hotel’s fourth floor. Finally, we thought, here was something to set our practical work in motion.

We were just in the middle of heaving the 15-kg jackets over our shoulders and figuring out how to work the satellite phones when I started receiving the first calls from journalists. As expected, every major inter-

Women outside a polling station in Jalalabad proudly show off their registration cards.  
Photo: Stephanie Bleeker





Voters' ink is applied at a polling centre for women in Jalalabad. Photo: Stephanie Bleeker

national media outlet, from the U.S. broadcaster, ABC, to the German weekly, *Die Zeit*, had sent a team to Afghanistan. All seemed to have arrived on the same flight, descending en masse on the "Intercon".

Initially, the mission managed to keep a low profile, but not surprisingly, media interest in the role of the Election Support Team grew. There seemed no end to inquiries, so we thought it wiser to hold a press conference to spell out our mandate rather than attempting to respond individually to every

request for an interview.

This decision turned out to be a smart one: Because of the dearth of real news stories prior to election day — there was hardly any campaigning going on — some reporters tried sniffing around for issues where there weren't any. For a very short while, the press conference, in which we explained the merits of a small mission, filled the news vacuum.

On election day, I woke up to the muezzin's call for the first prayers of the day. Gradually, the city turned on its lights, dispelling the darkness. The streets were strewn with red-brown piles of sand and dust, remnants of a desert storm, and the air was veiled with a thick fog. I wondered what the coming hours would bring. Would the prediction of our security specialists — that the voting would be marred by violence and clashes — come true?

As it turned out, 9 October 2004 was probably one of the quietest days in Afghanistan's recent history. Kabul's streets, normally clogged with traffic, were almost deserted.

While the capital was nearly incident-free, however, the same could not be said for the rest of the country. Security reports described shootings and explosions. In a

## Afghanistan's women: No looking back

Television footage showing massive throngs of Afghan female voters at polling centres, queuing patiently or beside themselves with excitement, flashed around the world.

More than 40 per cent of all the registered voters were women, and as likely as not, most of them exercised their right to be heard.

What did Afghan women have to gain from the election?

In fact, only one of the 18 presidential candidates was a woman — Dr. Massouda Jalal, a paediatrician and ethnic Tajik, who ran on an independent ticket.

Early exit polls suggested that she had received only 8 per cent of the female vote; many women were sceptical

about her "independent" status and felt that her husband exerted considerable behind-the-scenes influence over her. Final results showed that she ranked sixth, receiving 1.1 per cent of the vote.

Although some of the male presidential candidates did name a woman as one of their two vice-presidential running mates, none advocated a particularly strong gender-related agenda, which would anyway have been difficult to implement in Afghanistan's tradition-bound society.

For decades, despite the fact that they comprised some 60 per cent of society, Afghan women were not allowed to make the most ordinary decisions affecting their own lives. The 2001 Bonn Agreement opened up a whole new world

for them. Today, women can go outside the home on their own, earn a living, and attend school and university. Their first-time presence at the Olympic Games in Athens in August was a breakthrough that was much-heralded around the world.

The parliamentary elections in 2005 will usher in even more progress: The electoral law guarantees women a 25 per cent minimum political representation in parliament.

No matter how dramatic these changes are, however, Afghanistan's women still need to struggle to be able to take giant strides to catch up with their sisters in many other Muslim societies. Fortunately, the concepts of freedom of choice and gender equality are not a novelty for Afghanistan,

especially for its educated urban population. They have been there before.

This time around, however, the stakes are higher. There is no turning back, no leaving Afghanistan in the hands of warlords ever again.

Afghan women, with the help of the international community, simply have no choice but to take their destiny into their own hands—not merely through the ballot but by becoming deeply and politically involved in the rebuilding of their war-torn country and in its evolving institutions.

Massouda Jalal may have emerged disappointed at her performance in the presidential election, but she can be proud to have blazed the trail.

*Alexander Nitzsche*

close call, a truck filled with gasoline and a remote-controlled bomb was intercepted by police in Kandahar. Even so, it was a far cry from what had been widely forecast.

A common theory was that even the Afghan militants were amazed at the level of enthusiasm with which people had gone to cast their ballots. Everywhere, long, winding queues led to polling centres. Many citizens trudged through inclement weather, sometimes for hours, only to find that they had to wait several more hours to move to the head of the queue.

In the meantime, it emerged that, all over the country, many Afghan polling staff were encountering problems with the indelible ink that was meant to mark a voter's finger to avoid multiple voting, a practice used in a number of new democracies, with much success. It appeared that the ink had turned out to be less indelible than it should have been.

Before we knew it, some presidential candidates started talking about voter fraud and annulment of election results. Despite the absence of violence and a massive voter turnout, the international media, ever hungry for a fresh spin on the news, were competing to file stories on the "chaos" and "turmoil" in Afghanistan's first-ever presidential election.

The day after the elections, reports of angry demonstrators filtered in from certain parts of the country. Having gotten wind of the possibility of a boycott of the election and the annulment of election results, crowds were making known their displeasure at the candidates and the overall election process.

At this juncture, the OSCE team felt that the mission could no longer remain silent. In Kabul's newly-refurbished Amani High School, which served as the temporary international media centre, Ambassador Robert Barry, the head of the Election Support Team, read out a statement supporting Afghanistan's Joint Electoral Management Body in its view: The candidates' demand that the election should be nullified was unjustified.

His statement proved to be a turning point.

Many will remember little else about this election than the "ink issue". But one image will stay with me forever: the transformation of the Afghan landscape into an intense blue sea of *burqas*, as thousands of fearless women flocked to polling stations, pushing and shoving and elbowing their way to the ballot box.

**Alexander Nitzsche, a Press and Public Information Officer in the OSCE Secretariat, served as spokesperson for the Election Support Team in Afghanistan.**



## Election Support Team in Afghanistan "reflects positively on all of us"

*Several OSCE delegations commented on the unique nature of the election assistance provided to Afghanistan and commended the exemplary co-operation between the OSCE Secretariat, the ODIHR, the Afghan Government and the international community. The delegations were responding to Ambassador Robert Barry's report on the work of the OSCE Election Support Team in Afghanistan. The following are excerpts from some of the remarks made at a meeting of the Permanent Council on 21 October.*

"Despite the challenging security situation in Afghanistan, [the Team] fulfilled their tasks in good faith, with determination and, what is most important, with no casualties. The Chairmanship would also like to thank participating States that have supported the operation with personnel and funds. The first OSCE mission for election support in a partner country at a decisive stage in its development has proved to be a success..."

"The OSCE has brought to bear hidden resources and has demonstrated its poten-

tial for rendering support to democratic processes outside of its own geographic area. Its experience as a new type of OSCE instrument for election support and assistance to a partner country is an important asset for the Organization." **Bulgarian Chairmanship**

"We see great value in drawing lessons from this experience, particularly with a view to planning for the upcoming parliamentary elections." **Delegation of Canada**

"The European Union is pleased with the close co-operation between the OSCE Election Support Team and the European Union missions on the ground, in line with the excellent co-operative relationship between the EU and the OSCE generally." **Netherlands Presidency of the European Union**

"Some of my colleagues may remember that my delegation was insistent on calling this a 'team' rather than a 'mission'. And I am glad to say that together with the word 'team', the notion of 'support' took hold, since we did not consider it a classic mission. However, the only danger

here is that, while the notion of assistance is a very legitimate alternative to simple monitoring, we must be also careful that, together with assistance, we do not indirectly give ourselves the right to play a validating role ... So, before we think about duplicating this model, I think we need to reflect a little bit on where the mandate crosses the line between monitoring, assistance and validation." **Delegation of Armenia**

"The OSCE's decision to send an Election Support Team to Afghanistan embodies the very best of what the Organization is all about. It makes us proud for the OSCE to be an important participant on the international scene. The historic election in Afghanistan was, in the truest sense of the term, a confidence- and security-building measure, and our Organization responded to a direct request from the Afghan Government to lend support to this effort. The successful completion of the Afghan Election Support Team's mission is a real achievement for the OSCE and one that reflects positively on all of us." **Delegation of the United States**