

Delegation of Switzerland

**STATEMENT BY
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Democratic elections have a positive effect on stability, economic development and human rights. This also explains why election support programmes and election observation with a view to strengthening democracy are among the core tasks of the OSCE.

The mechanisms for the implementation of commitments in the OSCE's human dimension are weak because they are based on political negotiation processes and do not envisage any agency authorized to exercise control or apply sanctions that is independent of the State. However, election observation, which is intended to monitor how well election-related commitments are implemented and to propose improvements to the country in question, as well as election support programmes to help the country in carrying out these recommendations in a targeted manner, are among what may be the OSCE's most effective established implementation mechanisms.

Since the adoption of the Ministerial Council decision in Porto in 2002, we have been endeavouring:

- On the one hand, to improve the observance of the ODIHR's recommendations to the States based on election observations;
- On the other hand, to supplement the existing commitments with additional ones.

We have since had difficulty in agreeing on supplementary commitments, although the ODIHR has created an excellent basis for this with the Progress Report (2003) and the Common Responsibility Report (2006). Nor have we really managed to agree on how we might ensure observance by the States of these recommendations.

Election observation provides a means of strengthening our democracies – which could not be more different in the way they are configured – and of moving us closer to the implementation of election-related commitments. Election observation must not be allowed to degenerate into an end in itself. As we see it, the factors that determine the quality of an

election process (the legal framework and electoral system, electoral administration, registration of candidates and voters, election campaigns, the media, complaints procedures, etc.) are crucial for determining whether an election has been free and fair. The work of the core team and of the long-term observers is of decisive importance here.

An increasingly important aspect to which I should like to draw attention concerns the importance of election support for preventing violence in connection with elections. Mr. Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, pointed out in the addendum to his May report on election-related violence and killings that in 2008 nearly 20 per cent of all the elections held around the world claimed lives. We should therefore do all we can to ensure that during election periods factors that might lead to conflicts are identified at an early stage and that preventive measures to deal with them are devised. Switzerland is committed to preventing violence during election processes. Within the framework of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), our country is working on an instrument for the identification of factors that might lead to conflict in election situations and for the development of preventive measures. Election-related conflicts are a familiar problem in Africa but affect other regions as well. One need only think of Afghanistan or the forthcoming elections in Kyrgyzstan.

Further, election observation methods should take account of new technologies such as electronic voting. Given that every OSCE participating State has its own history of democratization, the voter should continue to be free to decide whether he or she will cast his or her vote via the ballot box, by post, using a machine at the polling station, or over the Internet.

We believe it to be of key importance that in the future far greater emphasis be placed on the systematic follow-up of recommendations drawn from election monitoring. During the Corfu Process, a convincing procedure indicating how this goal might be achieved was outlined in a food-for-thought paper by Romania and a number of co-sponsors. National parliamentary delegations could also play a useful role in monitoring the implementation of recommendations drawn from election observations. In this way, the implementation of recommendations would become an ongoing task, to be tackled in the immediate wake of an election and not just before the next one.

Election processes provide human rights work with a platform that we should make use of. Democratic elections are marked, for example, by respect for freedom of speech, assembly, movement and the media and by the participation of national minorities – all subjects that we are also dealing with in detail here in Warsaw.

The ODIHR's record of achievement is impressive. The Office can look back at over 230 elections at the local and national levels that it has observed and evaluated. The ODIHR has succeeded in adapting its methods of election monitoring and support to the changing realities and emerging needs. Let us continue to take advantage of this momentum, let us concern ourselves with the instruments that have been devised by the ODIHR, and let us further develop them with specific objectives in mind.