

Original: ENGLISH



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Azerbaijan on ODIHR Election Observation

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 8, 2015

I wanted to just respond to some of the comments made by our distinguished Azerbaijani colleague, as well as by the European Union. I recall the ambassador of Norway's point of a few minutes ago that this seems an odd conversation – and particularly this conversation, which is about a personal accusation leveled at the director of ODIHR – it seems an odd conversation to have in his absence. It may be an odd conversation to be having in the Permanent Council; I think it would be respectful and considerate to engage the director of ODIHR directly, or to at least engage on this topic at a time when he is present.

The second point I wanted to make is that, reading between the lines of the statement of Azerbaijan today, it sounds as if there may be some regret that we've ended up where we have. And the challenge is that because ODIHR, which had clearly communicated its schedule and timeline, and because ODIHR doesn't have enough funding to keep an army of talented observers on stand-by and depends on participating States to second those long-term and short-term observers, etc., it has to stick to that timeline in order to deliver the gold standard, credible report. And because Azerbaijan was unwilling to welcome the number of long-term observers needed to deliver a credible assessment through observation of the upcoming parliamentary elections, that was impossible. It's a bit like saying: "I invited you over to my house to do a diving demonstration, but I'd like you to do it in a pool with only 50cm of water in it." Just because I say, in response, that I won't participate in that diving demonstration doesn't mean that I've cancelled it: it means that you've limited me and made it impossible for me to deliver what I'm on the hook to deliver.

If it is the case that I'm right, and that Azerbaijan regrets having obstructed the observation by ODIHR and forcing the cancellation, then that is truly regrettable, because I know that the Director – as I had engaged him and said how important the United States believed it was that ODIHR be able to carry out its mission – he was deeply, personally committed to finding every way to make sure that ODIHR could deliver the kind of top-quality observation that it has become so well-known for. So that is a regrettable circumstance in which we find ourselves. Unfortunately the elections now, I believe, fewer than four weeks out. Long-term observation as part of a credible observation effort takes at least six weeks... and we are where we are.

I just want to close by echoing the European Union's statement of strong support for the work of ODIHR and our strong sense that the work of ODIHR is an asset for all of us, from which we can all draw guidance and substance to help inform each of our efforts for more perfect implementation of our shared OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Madam Chair.