



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **On Local Elections in Ukraine**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
October 29, 2015

We congratulate millions of people in Ukraine for exercising their right to vote in Sunday's elections, demonstrating that democracy in Ukraine remains resilient.

These elections take on added importance because of the enhanced responsibilities authorities and local governments will inherit as the Ukrainian parliament completes the process of constitutional reform and decentralization.

The elections took place despite difficult economic conditions and at a time when Ukraine faces and has faced Russian aggression, including Russia's occupation of Crimea. We congratulate the government and people of Ukraine for going forward with these elections under such circumstances.

The elections were, as the international election observation mission concluded, competitive and well organized, and showed respect for the democratic process – an observation borne out by the fact that opposition parties did well in some parts of the country.

International observers noted an inclusive and open accreditation process for observers, which contributed to the transparency of the electoral process. Moreover, observers found that voting and vote counting were transparent. They further noted that freedom of peaceful assembly was generally respected within a competitive campaign environment. The United States congratulates Ukraine's Central Election Commission, which has established a strong international reputation for the conduct of elections in the new Ukraine.

Still, ODIHR found areas for improvement that will require substantive engagement by the Ukrainian government, political parties, and civil society. The fact that Ukraine remains open to improvement, as the Ukrainian ambassador just said, is in itself a major improvement over past governance. It is also laudable that the central and local election commissions acted swiftly to address reports of irregularities.

Concerns regarding ballot irregularities prevented polls from opening in the city of Mariupol; such irregularities occurred in less than 1 percent of all precincts. Polls opened in over 29,000 precincts across Ukraine. We expect that Ukrainians in Mariupol and other areas where voting could not take place will have the opportunity to vote November 15, when runoff elections will occur in many cities across Ukraine.

We also hope the citizens living in the conflict zone, internally displaced persons, and refugees will soon have the opportunity to exercise their right to choose their leaders, in compliance with Ukrainian law, consistent with OSCE standards, and as called for in the Minsk agreements.

And of course we look forward to the day when lawful local elections are held in Crimea and Sevastopol, which remain part of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.