

ODIHR SEMINAR
ELECTION OBSERVATION AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS
30 OCTOBER 2018, VIENNA
DRAFT ANNOTATED AGENDA

INTRODUCTION

Democratic elections are recognized globally as the cornerstone of democracy and regarded as one of the key elements of long-term security and stability. A range of international obligations and standards for democratic elections, including OSCE commitments, serve to safeguard the principle that the will of the people, freely expressed in periodic and genuine elections, constitutes the basis for the authority of government.

The Seminar will give an opportunity to OSCE delegations, election experts and practitioners from electoral management bodies, parliamentary assemblies, international organizations, and citizen observer and civil society groups to discuss challenges and good practices related to the implementation of election-related commitments. In particular, the Seminar will focus on a review of OSCE commitments, international obligations and other standards for democratic elections with a focus on fundamental freedoms pertaining to election campaigns.

The Seminar will be organized in accordance with identified priorities and the ongoing efforts of the OSCE Chairmanship, held by Italy, to further strengthen the implementation of all OSCE human dimension commitments and to facilitate a broad dialogue among OSCE participating States.

OVERVIEW

The introductory part of the Seminar will include opening addresses, to be followed by discussions in two working sessions on:

- OSCE Commitments, International Obligations and other Standards for Democratic Elections.
- Fundamental Freedoms and Election Campaigns.

Both sessions will include presentations by OSCE participating States' representatives and experts, to be followed by interventions and discussion.

TENTATIVE AGENDA

(Neuer Saal)

09:30 Registration

10:00 Opening Addresses

10:30-12:00 SESSION 1: OSCE Commitments, International Obligations and other Standards for Democratic Elections

A range of international obligations and standards form the foundational framework for the conduct of genuine and democratic elections. This framework comprises instruments and documents related to the overall conduct of elections as well as to specific aspects of the electoral process.

Obligations of OSCE participating States extend beyond the OSCE commitments, which can include responsibilities under international law, treaty interpretation by such bodies as the United Nations Human Rights Committee, legal standards emanating from the Council of Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, decisions by the European Court of Human Rights as well as good electoral practice as developed by ODIHR and the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). Such evolving and common obligations and standards, along with national legislation, are significant as they form the basis according to which OSCE participating States develop and refine their electoral practices, and also provide a common basis for international and citizen observers to assess conformity. The session will offer an opportunity to renew understanding of existing obligations and standards for democratic elections, to consider the latest developments, to analyse challenges to their implementation and to identify good practice.

Aspects to be addressed:

- International legally binding instruments in the field of elections;
- International good practice and case law;
- Latest advancements in the field of election-related standards and practice, particularly with respect to electoral dispute resolution;
- Good practice in implementation of standards for democratic elections and the follow-up of ODIHR electoral recommendations.

12:00 – 12:30 COFFEE BREAK

12:30-14:00 SESSION 2: Fundamental Freedoms and Election Campaigns

OSCE commitments require that law and public policy work to permit campaigning to be conducted in a fair and free atmosphere in which neither administrative action, violence, nor intimidation bars parties and candidates from freely presenting their views. Fundamental freedoms, such as the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association and movement must be respected at all times. There should be no arbitrary or unreasonable restrictions on campaign activities. It is also particularly important that campaigning is free from violence, pressure or intimidation.

The Internet has become an important platform for conducting electoral campaigns. Candidates, parties, and civil society organizations use the Internet, including social networks, to reach out to and inform voters, traditional media increase their presence online and voters use online tools to solicit information and exchange views and opinions. While the use of the Internet has a potential to broaden and strengthen political participation, including by underrepresented groups such as women, persons with disabilities, youth and national minorities, this is contingent upon the protection of civil and political rights, including freedom of expression, in the online domain.

This session will provide an opportunity to discuss OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards that permit campaigning to be conducted with respect for fundamental freedoms, and benefits and challenges of the increasing use of the Internet as a campaign platform.

Aspects to be addressed:

- OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for election campaigns;

- Promoting the participation of underrepresented groups, including women, national minorities, persons with disabilities and youth
- Ensuring the respect of fundamental freedoms, such as the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association and movement, necessary for free campaigning;
- Considering benefits and challenges of the use of the Internet for campaigning.

14:00 – 14:15 CLOSING REMARKS

14:15 -15:30 LUNCH PROVIDED BY ODIHR