

40th SESSION – second part / 40^e SESSION - deuxième partie

**RECURRING ISSUES BASED ON ASSESSMENTS RESULTING
FROM CONGRESS MONITORING AND ELECTION OBSERVATION
MISSIONS (reference period 2017-2020)**

(part 2)

Speaking Notes by Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (5 minutes)

In general, over the past years, there have been improvements in certain electoral areas such as the regulation of financing of political parties and election campaigns and the introduction of provisions on increased political participation of women.

Other positive developments to welcome are the implementation of voting rights for internally displaced persons in Ukraine and the reinstatement of local elections in the city of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, after twelve years of the absence of local elections.

However, similarly to the situation with the Charter's application, previously identified recurring issues arising from election observation missions also remain relevant for the reported period. They concern the following problems:

- the accuracy and quality of voters' lists;

- the misuse of administrative resources during electoral campaigns;
- the professionalism and politicisation of the electoral administration at all levels;
- the trust of voters in electoral processes.

As for the accuracy of voters' list, I would like to point to the problem of voters who live *de facto* abroad but remain registered as residents. In fact, they remain on the electoral lists in their country of origin and thus may exercise their right to vote at a grassroots' level. This raises the issue of absence of a "genuine link" that should exist between the voters and the municipality where they cast their ballot.

Next, as regards the misuse of administrative resources during the electoral process, most notably with regards to the campaign activities and the access to the media, it has made its way into the established European political culture. This problem exists both in emerging democracies and in countries with a long-standing democratic tradition.

The politicisation of election administration continues to undermine the public confidence in elections and their results. To gain overall public trust in the process, countries should ensure professionalism, independence and transparency at all levels of electoral management bodies.

We also suggest the introduction of legal provisions to penalise all forms of pressure unduly exerted on voters as a concrete measure to increase public confidence in the electoral process. In the countries where such laws exist, they need to be effectively implemented.

Finally, over the past several years, compliance with the principle of equal level playing field for all candidates particularly for opposition and independent candidates has become another recurring issue. All candidates should be able to stand in elections on equal footing without pressure and discrimination, and regardless of their party affiliation. Therefore, the Congress intends to focus on this topic and prepare a thematic report listing relevant states' practice. We will provide the recommendations.

I would also like to raise another sensitive issue, which we have recently observed in Council of Europe member States - the rise of polarisation during electoral campaigns. Political discourse increasingly reflects nationalistic attitudes and it divides populations along ethnic and political party lines. Confrontational, aggressive and inflammatory rhetoric overshadows the real policy issues and has a negative impact on the media environment and safety of journalists. I also believe that future observation missions should pay particular attention to online hate campaigns during elections.

Finally, due the pandemic-related travel restrictive measures, this year the Congress has cancelled on-site electoral missions. However, we will continue observing grassroots' elections remotely and we will resume routine election observation missions as soon as possible.

As Leen VERBEEK has already highlighted speaking about the draft recommendation, it is important to invite national authorities to strengthen political dialogue with the Congress to implement the election-related recommendations and relevant soft-law instruments, through post-electoral procedures.

We invite you to adopt this draft resolution and the draft recommendation and are ready to take your questions.

Thank you!