

1) What is your assessment of the results of recent elections in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan?

The OSCE assesses the only election process; we are only interested in results as far as they are announced in a timely, transparent and honest manner.

The November 2005 parliamentary election in Azerbaijan did not meet a number of OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards, despite some improvements during the pre-election period. There was uncertainty with regard to key aspects such as voter registration, and the election period was marred by continued restrictions on the freedom of assembly. The voting itself was calm, but counting proved problematic in over 40% of the polling stations.

The 10 July Kyrgyz presidential election marked tangible progress towards meeting OSCE and other international commitments for democratic elections, although the vote count proved to be problematic. Fundamental civil and political rights were generally respected and there was an improved media environment.

2) Is there (in your opinion) general template for assessing elections or is it necessary to take into consideration national, religious and cultural specifics of each country?

Yes, there is a general template, based on the commitment of all OSCE participating States to hold democratic elections that are universal, equal, fair, secret, free, transparent and accountable. The OSCE states have mandated the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR, to observe elections according to these basic standards.

3) Russia is accusing the OCSE of double standards in election monitoring? What is your attitude?

The OSCE observes elections according to the standards I just mentioned. These standards do not change, whether the OSCE is observing in the US, Russia or Bulgaria, or any other country for that matter.

4) OSCE observers are complaining that their opinion are not taken into consideration when preparing final reports on election monitoring? How does this relate to OSCE's democratic standards? How are final reports prepared?

Our observation is done in a very democratic manner, since observations of all our monitors, sent to us by fax, are taken into consideration when preparing the preliminary statement. This statement is issued the day after the voting. A final report is then prepared few weeks later, adding observations of the complaints procedure if applicable, and recommendations. Both reports are based on observations which we receive from all our observers.

5) What is the reason for different views between OSCE and CIS observers?

The OSCE has developed an internationally recognized observation methodology based on the commitments of all OSCE states to hold democratic elections. These standards have been used for a decade to assess over 150 elections and referenda and have been the basis for election observation of several other international organizations, such as the EU. I cannot speak about the CIS observation methodology since I am not familiar with it, nor can I draw any conclusion why there is a difference between the OSCE and the CIS one.

6) What is basic difference between Moscow's attitude towards the OSCE' reform and of the European countries attitude? How deep are these reforms and when will they take place?

I do not believe that there is a very deep gulf between Moscow and as you say “the European countries”. Russia is after all also a “European country” and its approach to the OSCE has been supportive from the very beginning. Since the Organization is a value-sharing joint undertaking by 55 nations, its co-operative approach to security, along with its comprehensive aspect, is its distinguishing feature. That means that whatever differences get aired, they are out-weighed by the basic accord over its shared values and commitments.

Some criticisms coupled with calls for reform of the OSCE were made last year by the Russian Federation and several members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In response, under our Chairmanship the OSCE named a Panel of eminent persons, including one ambassador put forward by Russia, to look into these points and offer their opinions. In July, they came up with a report and a list of recommendations. All except one of these had been agreed by consensus. So I believe that we were able to show by this mechanism that the OSCE has been responsive to the call for reform. We shall be discussing these findings this week in Ljubljana at the Ministerial Council and I hope we will see a further meeting of minds.

The reforms themselves are quite deep in the sense that they reach into the basic administration of the OSCE and its key negotiation-making mechanisms in Vienna, as well as into other areas where the OSCE could be made more effective. As soon as the ink has dried on the Ministerial Council documents, there will be an immediate effort to implement them, though obviously some points will be easier to put into effect than others. I am sure too that our successors in the Chairmanship, Belgium, will continue that task of implementation in 2006.