

End to biased and unprofessional election observation missions

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party convening in Warsaw, Poland on 1 to 3 December 2016:

Notes that:

- democracy is a fundamental value. The power of the people is exercised through fair and free elections. Election fraud threatens the very core of democracy. It discredits the institute of elections and thereby it also discredits democracy;
- the aim of election observation is to protect the right of the citizens to free and fair elections. The short-term goal of election observation is to reveal fraud and to recommend measures to improve the election process. The long-term goal of election observation is to contribute to the development of electoral legislation and institutions that deserve the trust of the people;
- the ODIHR, at the ALDE Party Congress in Budapest, called for more liberal involvement in election monitoring;
- election observation conducted in an unprofessional way corrupts the idea of democracy and discredits the institute of election observation;
- the most recent example of unprofessional election observation would be the assessment issued by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on the 26 September referendum of amendments to the Constitution of Azerbaijan. The PACE mission statement declares that "the voting process was transparent, well-organised, efficient and peaceful throughout polling day, no serious violations were observed during the counting process" and concludes that the referendum "is considered legal and legitimate";
- the PACE assessment does not take into account the critical human rights situation in the Azerbaijan, the systematic restriction of independent mass media, political opposition and civil society activities. Domestic long-term observers state that "the Referendum day was marred with violations including ballot-box stuffing, multiple voting, group voting (carousel) and voting of persons without registration, similar irregularities from the previous elections [...] voter turnout was artificially raised in majority of polling stations through multiple voting and ballot-box stuffing. The official turnout does not correspond to real figures";
- unprofessional observation missions from PACE and the European Parliament is far from a new problem, nor are we talking about isolated cases. Already the November 2015 Parliamentary elections and the

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October 2013 Presidential elections in Azerbaijan were commented in a biased way by PACE short-term observers.

Considers that:

- it is of utmost importance to put an end to biased, ungrounded and politically motivated election observation missions;
- it is unacceptable that the name of the ALDE Party or Group appears in unprofessional or fraudulent election observation reports;
- liberals should take the lead in the fight against electoral fraud, and adhere to the highest standards.

Calls on:

- the Bureaus of the ALDE Party, the ALDE Groups in PACE and the European Parliament to investigate the functioning of the present election monitoring mechanisms; to analyse its flaws and weaknesses; to propose concrete measures to improve the quality of this important work;
- the Bureaus of the ALDE Party, the ALDE Groups in PACE and the European Parliament to issue a briefing for parliamentarians that observe elections in the capacity of ALDE parliamentarians;
- the Bureaus of the ALDE Party, the ALDE Groups in PACE and the European Parliament to initiate a procedure to hold mission members accountable for fraudulent and/or unprofessional election observation, as well as a procedure allowing parliamentary groups to block individual parliamentarians from taking part in election observation missions;
- all signatories of the Declaration of Principles for the International Election Observation to closely coordinate their observation efforts in order to avoid forum-shopping;
- the ALDE Group in PACE to strive for a reform of the process of selecting members of ad hoc election observation committees in order to ensure better political control of its outcomes.

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