**Transcript**

My name is Audrey Glover, and I had the privilege to head the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE from 1994 to 1997, at a time when elections were beginning to be taken seriously and the methodology for their observation was being developed. Subsequently, I have headed well over 20 election observation missions.

The Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was founded in 1975. The meeting of the Charter of Paris for a new Europe in 1990 created three CSCE Institutions, a Secretariat in Prague, a Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna and the Office for Free Elections in Warsaw.

The Office for Free Elections began its work in Warsaw, Poland in May 1991. It was set up to exchange information about elections between the CSCE Participating States against the backdrop of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. It began as a small office with two international staff and initially facilitated the exchange of information on elections. The Oslo Seminar of Experts on Democratic Institutions in November 1991 supported the idea of expanding the mandate of the Office and suggested changing its name. The office's mandate was subsequently broadened to include the full range of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The reason for doing so was because elections were regarded as a key pathway to democracy and because they were based on the exercise of human rights for which people had long suffered and striven.

Other organisations began to be created along with the ODIHR to observe elections and early missions show that initially observation was limited with narrow coverage, small teams and short reports. But in response to the increased interest in elections, the CSCE held a conference to draw up commitments in relation to elections – the so-called Copenhagen commitments.

These rights enable the voter to vote freely without any pressure and to make a real and informed choice of candidates thanks to an independent media. Voters must have confidence in the electoral system as a whole and the system needs to be transparent. Although an election cannot bring democracy, it is not possible to have democracy without elections

In the early years, the main task of an election observation mission was to assist new emerging democracies and their transition processes. To reflect this new mandate the name of the office was changed in 1992 to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Before an election observation can begin in a country, there must be an invitation to the ODIHR by the government concerned to observe the electoral process. The ODIHR responds and sends a Needs Assessment Mission to the country to decide what type of mission there should be and its size. It will decide whether it will be an EOM with a Core Team, Long-Term and Short-term Observers; or a Limited EOM with a Core team and Long-Term Observers; or an Assessment Election Mission with just a Core Team.

The Core Team is composed of people who have applied for the job, and they are selected and paid for by the OSCE. A Core Team will be composed of a political adviser, an election adviser, a lawyer, a media expert, a statistician, a campaign finance expert, a new technology expert as well as a Head and Deputy and logisticians. The media expert, with a team of assistants, monitors what is happening in the media daily – the Press, Radio, TV and also social media. One might have thought that by now the role of journalists in elections might have flourished. Unfortunately, that is not the case. A bleak picture has emerged in recent years about the treatment of male and female journalists.

The mandate of the OSCE/ODIHR was enhanced further in 1994 when it was charged to draw up procedures to observe the entire electoral process, from the beginning, during, and after election day. This enabled Missions to look at issues that might have profound effects on the election, such as voter and candidate registration, the training of members of local election commissions, the operation of the media and equal access of candidates to it.

Over its earlier years, the ODIHR's experience with observing elections developed an impressive methodology for the whole electoral cycle – to enable the participating States to hold democratic elections and for the elections to be observed by other participating States, thereby holding one another accountable to the standards that they had set themselves and so improve the conduct of elections.

Later in the 1990s the work of the Office expanded further – to include promoting the rule of law, strengthening civil society, preventing torture, the role and participation of minorities and the importance of the role of women in society. In 1999 it established the first full-time international official on Roma issues and it became the region's leading institution for election observation. It also helped governments and civil society with the practical implementation of human rights and democracy. The Office now has a staff of 140 people from more than 30 countries.

But how does an EOM [Election Observation Mission] operate? The Core Team will establish itself in the capital and start meeting all the relevant interlocutors—the parties, candidates, the Election Commission, NGOs, those in the complaints and appeals system and relevant government departments, plus those engaged in the registration of candidates and voters—and establish a media observation unit. A week later the LTOs

arrive. They are briefed and dispersed in pairs around the country to discover what is happening at the grass root level and report daily to the Core Team.

A few days before election day the STOs arrive to be dispersed in pairs around the country and be attached to LTOs. Their job is to observe the Election Day proceedings in different polling stations where they complete forms as to what they see and stay for the count and the tabulation. They are debriefed on returning to the capital

The present methodology assesses whether an election complies with OSCE election commitments. For this purpose, the observation covers not just the election day but, as I have already said, the whole electoral process beginning with the registering of the voters. An interim Report is issued during the mission. There is a press conference the day after the election with Preliminary Findings and a Final Report is published with Recommendations about two months later.

The value of this reporting lies in the fact that the Mission attaches the greatest importance to its impartiality and neutrality and ensures that it can back up any statement it makes with evidence. The members of the Mission are not politicians or election police but impartial election technocrats.

Civil society organisations within a state also have a role to play throughout an election cycle. Their members of course live in the country where the election is taking place and are acutely aware of what is happening during an election. If the reduction in the numbers of the LTOs and STOs requested by a government for an election continues to decrease, EOMs are likely to have to rely more upon the knowledge and assistance of local civil society organisations

What are the current challenges to elections? The development of election observation has not always been easy. At one stage the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly were not cooperative at all as they assumed that since they were politicians, they solely should be dealing with Election Observation process. The situation became quite serious.

As already mentioned, after every election there is always a Report setting out what went well and what did not. There are some semi-authoritarian regimes who are good at giving the appearance of living up to the international standards while subverting the integrity of the election process; And this, of course, is true of elections all over the world, not just in the OSCE area). There have been occasions when it was reported that a state was not meeting its commitments. The participating State concerned would ask for the “offending” section to be removed from the Report or for the Report not to be published at all.

However, the ODIHR has made it clear to participating States that they are an independent body and therefore will resist any attempt to influence what the ODIHR has written, said or advocated. On one occasion a senior member of the OSCE tried to

persuade the ODIHR to withdraw a report but to no avail. The ODIHR was steadfast in refusing to be influenced in any way, but that was not always easy. But attempts to influence the findings of the Final Report did eventually stop and the ODIHR never gave way.

I am very pleased to say that, while in earlier years there were only a few members of the Parliamentary Assembly willing to support the ODIHR robustly, now both bodies work extremely well together.

Now there are, of course, new challenges. The ODIHR, however, faces new and different challenges today. Probably the biggest is the insufficient funding the ODIHR receives from the OSCE. The chances of funding increasing are not high in the present financial climate. As a result, the ODIHR has the problem of deciding which elections it will observe.

Another large challenge is that the "politics" of election observation has become a problem because it is not settled within the OSCE. There have been attempts to undermine the whole process, but so far unsuccessfully. While election observation is necessarily dry and technical, it seems nonetheless to arouse impassioned politics and politicking.

Yet another problem is that participating states are not sending the requested number of LTOs and STOs to EOMS (they are seconded and paid for by the participating states). One reason for this is lack of money, but the basic issue is that of credibility for the OSCE. It is important that elections in all regions of the OSCE are observed properly. This applies particularly to participating states in Western Europe who tend not to send so many observers to elections in their region. This gives a "them" and "us" atmosphere with eastern states who become resentful that only their elections are observed. One reason for this may be lack of money but as I have commented the basic issue is one of credibility for the OSCE. It is important that elections are observed in all regions of the Organisation. One reason is the transparency of the electoral system in the country – an important concern for its voters. Another is that no election is perfect and states can learn from each other and each other's mistakes.

There is also the problem that some states do not invite the ODIHR to observe at all or, if they issue an invitation, they do so too late; or try to control the composition of the Mission and to become involved with drafting statements. The texts of Reports, as already mentioned, for obvious reasons are not negotiable with the State whose elections are being observed.

Every report that is published after an EOM contains Recommendations as to how the participating State whose elections are being observed could improve its electoral system. However, there is little take up of the recommendations in the report after the

elections. This is also a challenge and some people may consider that it defeats the object of the exercise of observation in the first place.

Some states like Norway, Canada and Switzerland among others voluntarily inform the Permanent Council what changes they have introduced as a result of the ODIHR's Recommendations. It would be good if more States did this. This is despite the fact that all States are obliged to report to the annual Human Dimension Committee on the implementation of their commitments.

Manipulation of elections is becoming more sophisticated. No longer do people rush into a polling station, seize a ballot box and throw it into the river, as happened in the past. One challenge now is the use of new voting technologies such as voting and counting machines which can be manipulated. One concern about this is the damage such practices can do to the confidence of voters in the system.

These manipulations have been matched by improvements in the ODIHR methodology. The ODIHR now have experts in new voting technologies as part of the core team on missions. But manipulation can take other forms as well – for example, the redrawing of boundaries; intimidating state workers to vote for the government; influencing the media including fake news, attacks on journalists; restricting the opposition's campaigning; and a corrupt judiciary; preventing people who are immobile from accessing the polling station; and requiring overseas voters to fax their votes when obviously they should be secret. The list goes on.

These all contribute to making it more difficult for voters to choose between candidates who should be able to campaign on an equal basis.

In response, the ODIHR has been regularly refining its election observation methodology and election observation missions are a demonstration of the international community's continuing support for democratic processes that are intended to promote public confidence in the electoral process and to assess the electoral environment.

One of the strengths of the OSCE lies in its complementary nature with respect to other international organisations that have been established over the years in relation to observing elections, NDI and IFES among others. The Helsinki process has proved that politically binding commitments can have a real impact on the formation of human rights standards. Having different organisations observing elections with ODIHR prevents forum shopping.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that the OSCE, and particularly the ODIHR, realise that there is a crucial need to preserve the high standards of human rights which are a basic feature particularly in the present international climate. The best way to achieve this is by assistance and cooperation. I am sure that the ODIHR would welcome more

commitment from participating states to enable them to fulfil their extremely important mandate, which they unfailingly are committed to doing and do so well.

It could be said that the success of the OSCE will be measured by the extent to which the States are prepared to give the human dimension standards a real meaning. It is more important than ever at the present time that they should do so when the world is riven by conflict and uncertainty. The maintenance of these standards is essential for the survival of democracy. Thank you.