

Strengthening Democracy: From Words to Action

Online Discussion on Civil Society Approaches to the New Democratic Pact for Europe

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Safeguarding of freedom and fairness of elections

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I believe that a practical task is to achieve maximum possible contribution of civil society to election monitoring. How can this be done?

Synergy is a keyword. The main partners are MPs and MEPs – STOs (short term observers). Both directly and via relevant bodies:

- 1) PACE Elections Division – main cooperation partner
- 2) PACE Committees' secretaries
- 3) Contact points in PACE, EP and national parliaments
- 4) OSCE ODIHR who ensures long-term observation

1. Practical aspects: STOs are witnesses rather than monitors, as a rule, have too limited knowledge of realities on the ground, and it is of utmost importance to assist and consult them on key issues requiring attention.

2. STOs are effective with regard to election day procedures, but nowadays the main problems used to emerge earlier, with the candidates' registration, access to media (incl. public broadcasting), use of administrative resources, abusive use of AI (e.g. deepfakes) etc. Civil society could collect relevant data on these issues and ensure that they are timely conveyed to the Elections Division and OSCE ODIHR LTOs, to be taken into account, inter alia, in the guidelines for STOs.

3. It is essential to raise the issue of the fake observers early and articulately. In a sense, these GONGOs try to undermine the election observation, therefore, exchange of relevant information both with the Elections Division, OSCE ODIHR and contact points should start as early as possible.

These might be the ideas for concrete proposals for the New Democratic Pact of Europe with regard to strengthening the role of civil society in safeguarding free and fair elections.