

OSCE Accepts Cap on Vote Monitors

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Correction: In an earlier version of this article, the name of the Dutch senator who will lead the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's mission was misspelled. His name is Tiny Kox.

Correction: Swiss lawmaker Andreas Gross initially said in e-mailed comments that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe would send a 30-member mission. He corrected the figure to 40 in a subsequent e-mail.

The top European elections watchdog has grudgingly accepted an invitation to send just 200 observers for the State Duma elections this December — 60 less than it had demanded.

"This is not ideal and not as planned, but we welcome that we got an invitation so promptly," Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer, a spokesman for the Organization for Security and Cooperation, said Tuesday.

Janez Lenarcic, the organization's chief election observer, said last month that the OSCE

wanted to send 260 observers and that the number was not negotiable.

Asked about Lenarcic's insistence, Eschenbächer said it was regrettable that the numbers were "slightly lower." But he added that the OSCE had decided to go ahead with the mission. "We expect that even with this figure we can do an adequate job," he said by telephone from Warsaw.

The OSCE plans to send 40 long-term observers to work in Moscow and some regions by Nov. 1, he said. The remaining 160 mission members will only work on Dec. 4, the day of the election. In addition to the 200 observers, a 10- to 15-member "core team" will be based in Moscow.

Eschenbächer said the written invitation was hand-delivered to Lenarcic on Sunday by a senior Russian diplomat. The document, however, does not mention numbers, and the figure of 200 was mentioned verbally by the diplomat, he said. He would not disclose the diplomat's name.

The Foreign Ministry [said](#) in a statement on its web site that it had agreed to invite OSCE monitors, but it added that the organization should "correct its methodology."

Reached by telephone Friday, a ministry spokesman asked a reporter to call back later, but did not respond to further calls.

Moscow has had a rocky relationship with the OSCE, whose observers have in the past regularly lambasted national elections as lacking in democratic standards. The Kremlin, in turn, has complained that the organization's Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights engages in unnecessary lecturing on democracy.

A low point was reached in November 2007 when the OSCE took the unprecedented step of canceling its observer mission to the Duma elections, complaining that the Foreign Ministry had sent the invitation less than five weeks in advance and imposed unacceptable restrictions.

Moscow is a founding member of the OSCE, which includes all former Soviet states, most European countries, the United States and Canada.

In a sign that difficulties persist, President Dmitry Medvedev said last month that the OSCE election missions display "double standards" and meddle in domestic affairs.

Lenarcic, who took over as director of the OSCE's Warsaw office in 2008, has said he wants to avoid a repetition of the "2007 scenario."

The Slovenian diplomat suggested this summer that he would like to send a 460-member mission to the Dec. 4 elections, but he reduced this figure to 260 during a September visit to Moscow, where he held talks with Vladimir Churov, the chairman of the Central Elections Commission.

Churov has regularly argued against the presence of many Western observers, saying the overall number, including observers from the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States, should not exceed 400.

He has also said the commission would assign observer tasks to football fans.

Critics point out that even 460 OSCE observers would be far too little to cover the country's 95,000 polling stations.

Lilia Shibanova, head of Golos, the country's only independent election monitoring organization, said the 200-member figure was a political compromise she could live with. "It won't make a big difference if we get 260 or 200 observers," she said by telephone.

Shibanova said the most important aspect would be the work of long-term observers in the regions.

"The OSCE's methods present a good opportunity to uncover violations in media access and the use of administrative resources," she said.

The 200 monitors appointed by Warsaw will not be the only OSCE observers. The organization's Parliamentary Assembly, which sent 40 lawmakers to the last Duma elections in 2007, is expected to send more this time.

And the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is sending a 30-member mission led by Dutch socialist Senator Tiny Kox, Swiss lawmaker Andreas Gross said in e-mailed comments Tuesday. He corrected the figure to 40 in an e-mail the following Monday.

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