

# Kiev Fires Back at Vote Observers

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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VIENNA — Ukraine, the new head of the European democracy watchdog OSCE, told the organization's election monitors on Thursday to refrain from political statements after they described the former Soviet republic's latest election as a "step backward."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara, who took over as chairman-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe at the start of the year, said he would take account of the criticism, but the election monitoring body, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, should stick to what it did best.

Ukraine held a parliamentary election last October in which President Viktor Yanukovich's Party of the Regions and its allies retained their majority.

But monitors from the 56-nation OSCE criticized the way the vote had been conducted and the imprisonment of Yanukovich's key rival, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, which stopped her from running.

After setting out his agenda for the OSCE chairmanship, Kozhara told reporters: "We also take seriously some political statements made by OSCE ODIHR, and especially the statement that the past election in Ukraine was a sort of step back." But, "We believe that OSCE ODIHR is a professional organization and those types of political statements do not invest into the positive role of OSCE ODIHR election monitoring."

Countries such as Russia often criticize the Vienna-based OSCE and the ODIHR for what they call a policy of double standards: being easy on pro-Western governments and tough on those at odds with the West.

Other critics of the OSCE say it is losing credibility by letting countries with weak democratic credentials hold the revolving chairmanship. Kazakhstan presided over the OSCE in 2010 despite never having a vote judged free and fair by the pan-European democracy group.

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