

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The author was commissioned by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to conduct an independent review of electoral activities of five multilateral organizations to which Canada belongs - the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Francophonie, and the Commonwealth, and the United Nations. Findings were drawn from 147 Canadian and international governmental, multilateral, non-governmental and academic sources, 45 interviews, and analysis of 79 electoral missions from 1994 until October 1997. Comparison was made in reference to objective criteria such as mission credibility, operations and impact, as well as the organizations' priorities and capacity for reform. The findings of the report reflect the views of the author and those he interviewed for the study, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Canada.

The report found that the Organization of American States generally does well on the ground with respect to electoral activities, and has built up significant credibility over the past decade. In a short period of time, it has gone from small, ad hoc observation missions to more systematic, comprehensive and objective electoral coverage. Greater emphasis must be placed, however, on long-term democratic institution-building, use of domestic observers, evaluation rigour, and cooperation with other international NGO groups. With a more sustainable and proactive approach, therefore, electoral assistance could be improved still further.

OSCE electoral activities - observation, assistance, supervision - have improved noticeably over the past several years in terms of operations, evaluative rigour, and objectivity; yet logistical problems and a narrow technical and short-term focus still present major problems. With respect to where and when the OSCE provides electoral assistance, there is also a sense that it is largely putting out fires with little strategic direction as to where and when it should observe or assist, and how it should tailor its missions to differing contexts. Accordingly, OSCE election and democratization work is adequate, but with very good potential for improvement in the area of long-term, democratic institution-building.

Francophonie electoral activities benefit from cultural and institutional similarities among the organization's very broad multilateral membership, a realistic and supportive approach to electoral and democratic development, and a body of knowledge and contacts acquired through five years of electoral support within member-countries. Serious problems with the scope, consistency, professionalism and credibility of election missions, however, are preventing the Secretariat from achieving its full electoral and democratic impact potential. As for the future, structural constraints and a weak learning ethic limit the likelihood of meaningful reform of Francophonie electoral activity in the short to medium-term.

Commonwealth missions provide very good logistics, professional observer support, and systematic and well-established operating procedures. Despite a well-developed comparative advantage in professionalism and rigour, however, Commonwealth electoral support still tends to be somewhat top-heavy and short-term. That is to say, while it can involve assertive and far-