

**“Election Observation: Theory and Practice”**  
**Observation Mission**  
**Presidential Election 20 June 2010**  
**Poland**

On 20 June, the group of 31 observers from Belarus, Lithuania and Sweden on the invitation of the National Election Commission monitored the conduct of elections on the Election Day as accredited short term international observers. The group visited 171 polling stations in Bialystok and Podlaskie area.

The observation team observed the Election Day including the opening of the precincts, the process of voting and counting. The observation was based on the provisions of the national legislation of Poland as well as international standards.

**In general, the elections were held in accordance with international principles and national legislation.** Almost at all polling stations there were three members of the Commission present at all times at the polling place. The election board members usually were friendly, cordial and open to questions. It is also welcomed that it is not allowed to sell alcoholic beverages during the day of election at net prices. It is a good practice in Poland that there is no early voting that is broadly used in Belarus.

We would also like to stress the high level of awareness of the way to cross the ballot with an “x” sign – which proves a certain culture is established and voters don't make mistakes with that. The presence of two seals on the ballot excluded possible manipulations with ballots. The Commission members were mostly aware of the procedures and followed the majority of them.

However, **some of the principles were violated** and constituted tendencies that we would like to state below.

1. The **secrecy principle** as a basic international principle also prescribed by the Polish legislation, was not always followed. In a lot of polling stations the observation mission noted numerous cases of open voting when a person's choice was visible. Open voting has been observed by all our teams. It happened because at some polling stations booths were not constructed in a way to guarantee secrecy, and the Commission failed to explain the voters the principle of secret voting. The understanding was also missing among voters. (At one polling station, a journalist from TVN 24 was making a report, filming some voters just inside the polling booth marking their ballots).
2. **Family voting and group voting** also demonstrated the lack of understanding on the side of voters and Commission. In many countries family voting is prohibited because of examples when e.g. a husband can control a wife's choice. If it happens nationwide, it can affect the election results significantly.
3. It has to be noted that the procedural omissions were especially visible in times of **crowding** (especially after the mass). There were no members that could help to regulate the flow of people or show them the booths or the ballot box.
4. **Voting without identification** was especially common in rural areas. Interestingly, at some polling stations chairpersons reminded the Commission members that they should ask for an ID. It gives us assumptions to think that normally the identification is not checked in rural areas.
5. Unfortunately, cases of mistrust or **incompetence** of Commission chairpersons regarding the **rights of observers** happened. Sometimes, observers were prevented from taking pictures without explaining reasons.

6. Universality of the vote was also put under question at some polling station, in particular by failing to ensure the **facilities for disabled people**. At one of the polling station our group observed an old lady in a wheel chair who was not able to vote because there was no possibility to enter the polling station. That also did not provide equal access of voters to polling stations.
7. The **seals on ballot boxes** at most polling stations were of inappropriate quality, and the marks of previous use were visible. Therefore, the integrity of ballot boxes could not always be guaranteed.

The mission was organized in the framework of the project "Election Observation: Theory and Practice" (EOTP) that is implemented in partnership of four organizations - United Centre of Initiatives for Belarus, Human Rights House in Vilnius, European Humanities University and Swedish International Liberal Centre. The previous missions were sent to Norway (2007 - Regional and Municipal election, 2009 - Parliamentary election), Lithuania (2008 - Parliamentary election, 2009 - Presidential election), Georgia (2008 - Presidential election), Ukraine (2010 - Presidential election), Belarus (2010 - local election).

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### **"We would like to have elections like this in Belarus" (Press-release)**

Despite the pattern of procedural deviations throughout many polling stations, the elections still pose a perfect example of **transparency of counting procedures**. Young Belarusians constituted a majority in our mission, and many of them have experience of observing elections in Belarus. "Compared to our country, the Polish election looks perfect. It is hard to believe it is possible to hold so open, observer-friendly and transparent elections just some 50 kilometers from the Belarusian border", - shared some of them.

A mere fact that **ballots are actually counted**, it is done openly with all the commission and the observers being able to see it, came as a surprise for Belarusian youngsters. The Commission usually was cooperative and able to provide all relevant information.

By contrast, when monitoring elections in their own country, the Belarusians had to go through a day of intimidation by the committee members, police and official observers when trying to fulfill their work at polling stations. Routinely, none of observers is allowed to see counting procedures in Belarus, commission members demonstrate hostility to monitors and deny access to information.

"We are looking forward to having elections like this in Belarus. Here you can be sure that the official results actually reflect the will of voters. It may seem simple, but, unfortunately, still fantastic for Belarus," - noted participants of our mission in Poland.