

Press-Statement
“Election Observation: Theory and Practice”
Swedish International Liberal Centre
Parliamentary election, Latvia 2 October 2010.

On 2 October 2010, a group of short-term international observers from the project “Election Observation: Theory and Practice” accredited under the Swedish International Liberal Centre observed the conduct of the Parliamentary elections in Latvia. The observers concentrated on procedures during the election day, namely opening of the polling stations, voting and counting. The observers visited 203 polling stations (21% out of all polling stations). The mission evaluated the voting process based on international standards and OSCE criteria as well as national legislation of the Republic of Latvia.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Central Election Commission of Latvia for assisting with the accreditation process and for the warm welcome of the mission in Latvia.

Registration process of voters was assessed as very good by all the teams – the system of double-checking of passport at the entrance and at the registration desk proved its reliability. This mechanism also prevented cases of voting without identification and multiple voting by one person. The counting was estimated as transparent by most of the teams, although the procedures were not always followed. In general, the elections were well-organized and the election commissions were mostly friendly and helpful to observers.

However, there are several omissions and shortcomings that have to be mentioned.

First of all, the secrecy of ballot, one of the basic international standards which is also protected by the national legislation in Latvia, was not always respected. In most of the polling stations visited by the mission, voter's choice was made public. This happened as some polling booths, voting compartments and rooms were not constructed in a way to guarantee secrecy, and the commissions failed to explain the voters the principle of secret voting. The understanding was also missing among voters.

The lack of understanding of procedures related to secrecy principle resulted in great number of people voting in groups and members of one family voting together.

The procedure of observers' registration at each polling station took an unreasonably long time and the necessity of the procedure could be questioned.

Even though the ballot boxes were sealed at polling stations observed, the seals varied from one place to the other. For instance, some observers reported one of the stickers to be missing. Also, the number of stickers could be different.

In spite of the mentioned deviations, the elections were held in accordance with international and national standards. We assess that the deviations mentioned did not affect the outcome of elections.

In total, the observation mission comprised of 35 observers from Belarus, Sweden and Lithuania. The Mission is organized within the framework of the project “Election Observation: Theory and Practice”, implemented in partnership by 4 organizations: the United Centre of Initiatives for Belarus (JuBIC), Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC), European Humanities University (EHU) and Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius (HRH). Previous project missions observed elections in Norway, Georgia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Poland, Sweden and Belarus.