

**Preliminary Statement**  
**Parliamentary Election in Slovakia on 10 March 2012**  
**“Election Observation: Theory and Practice” Observation**  
**Mission**  
**Belarus Watch**

**On 10 March 2012, a group of international observers from the project “Election Observation: Theory and Practice” accredited under non-governmental organization “Belarus Watch” observed the conduct of the Parliamentary election in Slovakia. The observers focused on procedural aspects of the election day and the counting of the votes. The observers visited 227 polling stations all over Slovakia.**

The mission would like to express the gratitude to the Central Election Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as for polling station members and Chairpersons for warm welcome of the mission and possibility to observe the voting and the counting.

The elections were well managed by the polling station commissions. The voting culture of voters has to be noted: although sometimes the polling stations were overcrowded, the voters were mostly patiently queuing to cast their ballot in secret. Opening procedures were well followed in the observed polling stations. The overall conduct of voting in majority of cases was assessed as good or very good.

The mission, however, noted several shortcomings and irregularities related to various procedures concerning voting and counting of votes as well as to the access to the observation itself.

The precinct commission members were not fully aware of the rights and status of observers. This resulted in observers being denied access to several stations; one team was not allowed to observe the opening procedure. During the voting the Commission members were asking for an accreditation card, however the legislation does not require any document as the proof of observer accreditation. The same practice was noted during the counting: the commissions were not aware of the regulations of observers' presence in the polling station although most of the teams were eventually allowed to observe the counting. Few teams were not allowed to enter; one of them was repeatedly rejected access by three polling stations. The mission considers it essential to specify the role of observer and elaborate a standard accreditation badge to prevent denial of election observers by the polling station officials.

The badges and nametags were missing among the commission members which created problems in identifying the exact number of commission members at certain polling stations.

In some polling stations the role and functions of the Chairperson could not be easily distinguished from the functions of other commission members. Sometimes persons other than Chairmen were in charge of organization of voting and counting. The selection procedure for Chairs differed from one polling station to the other and it was not completely clear what were the criteria for such selection and whether there was a unified practice.

Another issue in relation to the performance of commission is that not all the members received enough training and did not have equal knowledge of election

procedures. In some instances, the commissions noted they did not go through any training, which was especially typical for rural areas. Others were mentioning the training as not a necessary prerequisite to seat in the commission. However when asked about some procedures the commissions were giving controversial or outdated information.

There were cases of insufficient number of polling booths reported. The placement of the polling booth did not always guarantee secrecy of vote as the voters' preferences could be visible to others. The identification of voters was sometimes skipped; in several cases voters were presenting their passport instead of ID cards.

Also, sealing the ballot box was not standardized. Various sealing patterns were encountered by the mission, some of which did not provide for complete immunity of the box. For example, not always the stamp and signatures of commission members were present on the seal; in the other polling stations the quantity of the signatures differed. Sometimes the seals were also used to bond the boxes to the floor.

The polling stations were only rarely equipped for disabled people; many were located not on the ground floor which made it hard for elderly to access it.

The counting in most of the cases went smoothly however there were reports when not all the procedures were strictly followed.

In total, the observation mission was comprised of 39 observers. The Mission was organized within the framework of the project "Election Observation: Theory and Practice", co-implemented by three organizations based in Lithuania: Belarus Watch, European Humanities University and Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius. Previous project missions observed elections in Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the Ukraine.