

Press-release

Presidential election in the Republic of Belarus

December 19, 2010

The results of the non-partisan election observation

On December 19, 2010 the participants of the project “Election Observation: Theory and Practice” jointly implemented by three organizations: Belarus Watch (Lithuania), European Humanities University (EHU, Lithuania) and the Belarusian Human Rights House (Lithuania) monitored the process of the presidential election in the Republic of Belarus. The Mission consisted of 94 people, including the EHU students and the representatives of the Belarusian third sector. The monitoring was organized and conducted in cooperation with the campaign “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” and the movement “For Freedom”. The participants of the Mission of the project “Election Observation: Theory and Practice” monitored voting on the day of the election, and in some cases during the early voting on 31 polling stations in Minsk, as well as on 24 polling stations in Grodno, Vitebsk, Molodechno, Novogrudok, Polotsk, Lida, Beryozovka and Borisov.

In general, a certain progress should be recognized in how the commissions worked on the day of election, which was expressed in a relatively friendly attitude on the part of the members of the commission towards the monitors. In many cases the polling stations were well-organized and all ballot boxes were placed inside the room at the polling station, as required by law.

Nevertheless, many monitors noted that there were facts of hampering the monitoring by the members of electoral committees and by the monitors from the non-profit organizations loyal to the authorities. In particular, even though all the participant of the Mission got officially registered as monitors, many were not able to fully exercise their rights. For instance, even when the members of the electoral commissions did not directly confront the independent monitors, there were cases of the latter being refused full comprehensive information. Apart from that, the monitors were put in a special place that did not always allow for a satisfactory observation of the procedures. Photography and videography was likewise prohibited. It has to be noted as well that, as a rule, the election commissions interpreted the Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus in such a way as to limit the monitors in exercising their rights.

At the time of monitoring the early voting, the project participants and other independent monitors identified and documented the following fundamental violations. First of all, it was observed that the employees of the state-owned organizations and institutions as well as the students at the educational institutions and the personnel of the military regiments were forced to vote early on a large scale.

At some of the polling stations discrepancies were documented between the number of early voters according to the monitors’ calculations and the number of such voters according to the protocols of the electoral commissions. The facts of improper provisions to secure the integrity of the ballot boxes during the breaks in the work of the commissions and during night time were identified, as well as the facts of presence of unauthorized individuals (in particular, police officers, representatives of city executive

committees, etc.). At one of the polling stations the monitors discovered that the condition of the ballot box allows throwing in unauthorized ballot papers without compromising the integrity of the seal.

On the day of election itself, the Mission participants monitored the opening of the polling stations, the work of electoral commissions throughout the day, the field voting organized for the voters located far away from the polling stations, as well as the procedure of counting the votes and the announcement of the results of the voting. At each of these stages of the process numerous violations were documented:

- restriction of the work of the monitors by the members of the electoral commissions and their refusal to provide information about the total number of voters at the polling stations, and about the lists of the citizens who expressed the desire to vote at the polling station closest to their actual location;
- prohibition to photograph, record on video or document the information about the voting process in any form;
- discrepancy between the number of ballot papers, allocated to the members of electoral commissions, and the number of citizen, who expressed the desire to vote at the polling station closest to their actual location;
- presence of campaigning materials inside the voting booths, in particular, the instruction on how to fill in the ballot paper contained the checked box near the name of one of the candidates.

The most troublesome stage of the voting procedure was the counting of votes, that had been carried out with violations at almost all of the polling stations where the Mission conducted monitoring. Despite the clarifications and resolutions of the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Belarus regarding the procedure of vote-counting, the monitors were not allowed to see the contents of ballot papers. The majority of the polling stations adhered to the counting procedure that did not include the announcement of the intermediary results, the counting was done by all members of the commissions together, who then silently passed the information about the results to the secretaries of the commissions. At many polling stations the votes were not counted and results were not announced separately for each of the candidates and each of the ballot boxes.

In several cases violations in the protocols were documented: it was impossible to establish correlation between the information put down in the protocols and the results of the vote counting (the commissions were “adjusting” the figures to make them correspond to the common target numbers, which caused the commissions to spend more time to put together the protocols than to count the votes).

Besides that, commissions often finished working not allowing the monitors any time or possibility to file protests against the decisions that were taken.

Therefore, in spite of the improvements in the organization and conduction of the main voting day of the election, the participants of the project “Election Observation: Theory and Practice” point at the numerous violations of the procedure during the counting of the votes at the polling stations, as well as violations in various aspects related to the access for monitoring, which makes the results of the election, produced in this way, questionable.

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