

Post-Election Report

Election Observation: Theory and Practice

Election Observation Mission

Ukraine, Presidential Election, 17 January 2010

On 17 January 2010, forty-seven participants of the project “Election Observation: Theory and Practice” went to Ukraine to observe the first round of the Ukrainian presidential election. The project group included the students of the European Humanities University, representatives of Belarusian NGOs, Swedish and Lithuanian civil activists and students. The participants were divided into four groups and spread into four areas: Donetsk, Kyiv, Lviv and Odessa.

On 16 January, 2010 the participants were monitoring the pre-election campaigning and assessing its compliance with the legislation. On the Election day 17 January, 2010, the groups in each region were visiting the offices of the candidates and interviewing their representatives, meeting the members of Ukrainian youth NGOs interested in the political development in Ukraine, attending press-conferences devoted to the election process, cooperating with the Committee of Voters of Ukraine (an NGO conducting local long-term observation).

On the Election Day, participants of the project group conducted a survey among the voters in Ukraine. The results of around 500 surveyed people reflected the attitude of citizens towards the estimated value of their vote and the degree of trust for the Ukrainian electoral system.

The interviews with voters revealed that Ukrainian population was rather disillusioned regarding the candidates, the hope of changes and fairness of the elections itself. Disappointment of the consequences of the Orange Revolution made the voters pessimistic regarding the democratic future of the Ukraine. The interviewees raised their concerns about possible fraud during the Election Day.

Nearly all the interviewees agreed that the vote buying/selling existed. One trustworthy respondent personally experienced the invitation to sell his vote. According to his words quite a few of his friends and acquaintances had accepted the offer. The recruitment was performed by inviting people to a “special place”, where the instructions were supposed to be given. The promised price was 100 UAH.

It was very important for people to emphasize that they made the decision as independent individuals, not as a part of a collective. Everyone was eager to stress that they had not been under any impact of anyone when deciding who to vote for, even before having been given the options of relatives, coworkers etc. Two respondents also accentuated that they voted differently from their spouses.

It has to be mentioned that people were interested only in political efficiency and improvements in everyday life, but not in geopolitics. They talked a lot about the fact that the politicians did not keep their promises and did not care about ordinary people and their private economy. The voters did not ever mention macropolitics.

In several cases the interviewers of the EOTP project were asked to leave the territory next to the polling. This occurred due to misunderstanding of the mission of observers who were suspected to agitate for certain candidates. Still in most cases people were friendly and agreed to participate in the interview.

The overall impression of the presidential election in Ukraine 2010 was that people had a mixed feeling about the election. On the one hand they were interested in the outcome, but at the same time they did not expect serious changes.

However, concerning the election procedures the atmosphere was different from the last election. For instance, the organizations working in order to conduct exit polls found it much easier to succeed in their work in comparison to the preceding election since people then were more willing to use interviews of such a kind as a tool of control that no fraud occurred.

The development of new social media contributed to people's actual knowledge of the whole election process. For instance, some voters had been trained in how to use twitter in order to report about deviations in the electoral procedures in a polling station. Social media also included the campaigns of the candidates. However, the use of new media had also been problematic for some candidates for a number of reasons (e. g. fake users, claims).

People were concerned about perspectives the candidates were using when they talked about the future country's development, which seemed to be ignored in the campaign. That is why it would be interesting to follow the Parliamentary Election, which is going to be held in spring 2010 as far as it could play much bigger role in Ukrainian people's life than the elections of the president.

The Mission was organized within the framework of the project "Election Observation: Theory and Practice", implemented in partnership by four organizations: Belarus Watch, European Humanities University (EHU), Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius (HRH) and Swedish International Liberal Centre (Silc). The previous project missions were held in Norway, Lithuania and Georgia.