

“Election Observation: Theory and Practice”

Short-term mission to Sweden 18 September-22 September 2010

On 18th and 19th September 2010 a group of Belarusian observers from “Election Observation: Theory and Practice” project observed the conduct of Parliamentary, regional and municipal elections in Sweden. The observers visited around 40 polling stations in Stockholm.

The voters list, and especially, the usage of different colors to identify different types of elections in the electoral roll, ensured that each vote would be counted. The system of double-checking the information by the person's consecutive number, identification number and name, quickened and simplified the process of finding people in the list. It was considered outstanding that the personal data is well-protected and in most polling stations voters have the possibility to get back the voting cards from the commission members after having voted. The presence of a detailed description of materials necessary to be at the polling station showed the professional level at which elections are organized. The existing envelope system is efficient and easy to deal with.

Pre-voting system used in Sweden to attract more voters provides for safety and consideration of all the votes as the actual ballots stay untouched until the counting procedure at a polling station starts. In general, the option of changing a vote was considered a good practice as it increases trust to early voting as such.

According to Election Act, identification is only necessary when a voter is not recognized by the officials working at a polling station. Nevertheless, the observation shows that voting clerks mostly ask for identifications even if they seem to know voters.

At the same time there are several irregularities that have to be addressed.

1. The **visibility and accessibility of ballots** may encourage open voting. Some voters take a ballot with their preference in front of all present in a voting room. This undermines the principle of secrecy as such.
2. In most of the polling stations observed by the mission, there were **no seals on the ballot box**. Although not obligatory by the Swedish electoral law, the sealing is used to guarantee that the ballot box remains closed throughout election day. There was a case observed when the chairperson at one of the polling station opened the ballot box in the middle of election day.
3. There were some problems with the **counting**. One of the groups witnessed a case with a discrepancy of 70 votes (out of around 1200 voters) during the counting. The numbers remained unmatched. Also, the mission encountered several ways of counting prevotes in different polling stations.

The mission was organized in the framework of the project “Election Observation: Theory and Practice”. The project is implemented in partnership by four 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 (local and Parliamentary), Georgia (Parliamentary), Lithuania (Parliamentary and Presidential), Ukraine (Presidential), Poland (Presidential). The observers also have experience and intention to observe elections in Belarus.

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