



**Election of the President of Belarus 2010:
Weekly Analytical Review (29 November – 5 December)**

CONCLUSIONS

1. On 30 November, the Central Election Commission (CEC) adopted amendments to the Methodical Recommendations for Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) proposed by opposition political parties and a number of presidential candidates. These amendments concern additional measures to protect the voting process from potential falsifications: sealing the slots in the ballot boxes for the hours when polling stations are closed during the early voting period; and a requirement to store ballot papers in sealed safe deposits.

2. At the same time, the CEC refused to allow observers to be present at the polling stations overnight during the early voting period, and once again dismissed the proposal to describe the process of vote count in detail, i.e. ignored those elements of voting process which are most vulnerable to potential falsifications.

3. CEC refusals cause particular concerns vis-à-vis on-going training workshops for the PEC members who have been instructed to carry out the vote count so that each PEC member silently counts votes on his (her) own, and observers are not allowed to be close to the place of counting.

4. In all regions state administrative resources have continued to be applied to ensure mass early voting.

5. Pre-election campaigning, which for the first time since 1994 includes live broadcast of candidates' debate on the First National TV Channel, has been held without significant obstacles.

6. Representatives of the executive power in the election commissions have carried out preparations to counteract independent observation by orchestrated efforts of observers from pro-governmental NGOs. The latter have been tasked to disrupt actions of independent observers and journalists, and to compile acts confirming correctness of vote count in case PEC members representing opposition political parties refuse to sign final protocols or file dissenting opinions.

I. PREPARATIONS FOR VOTING

On 30 November, the Central Election Commission (CEC) considered an application by Chairman of the Belarusian Left Party “Just World” Siarhei Kalyakin, Deputy Chairman of the Human Rights and Educational Movement “For Freedom” Viktor Karnyaenka, and candidates for the Presidency Ryhor Kastusyou, Alyaksei Mikhalevich, Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu, Yaraslau Ramanchuk, Vital Rymasheuski, Andrei Sannikau and Mikalai Statkevich. They proposed that the CEC adopts resolutions, which would ensure a more transparent election process and contribute to minimization of manipulations during voting, especially during the early voting period.

The proposals related to the following aspects of the electoral process: signing of all blank ballot papers received by a Precinct Election Commission (PEC) by the same two PEC members; defining procedures for storing ballot boxes during the whole period of early voting; the opportunity for observers to be present at the polling stations during the entire period of early voting (14–18 December), including night hours.

Having considered the proposal, the CEC has adopted Resolution No 150 of 30 November, which amends the Methodical Recommendations “Organizational and Legal Aspects of the Work of Precinct Commissions during Election of the President of Belarus in 2010” (approved by the Resolution No 45 of 15 September).

The Methodical Recommendations have been supplemented by a chapter “Measures to Ensure Protection of Ballot Boxes and Election Documents during Early Voting Period”. According to the latter, on each day of early voting, at 14:00 and 19:00, PEC chair has to seal the slot in the ballot box with a sheet of paper which is signed by the PEC chair or his (her) deputy, and by one of the PEC members. The slot is to be unsealed before the voting hours, at 10:00 and 16:00, by the PEC chair or his (her) deputy. Observers and journalists are allowed to witness this procedure.

In addition, according to the supplement, from 19:00 till 10:00, and from 14:00 till 16:00, lists of voters and blank ballot papers have to be stored in safe deposits or metal boxes, which are to be sealed by the PEC chair or his (her) deputy.

The proposal concerning 24-hour observation at the polling stations was not supported by the CEC. According to CEC Chair Lidziya Yarmoshyna, protection of public order and ballot papers in the premises of polling stations will be ensured by “impartial” police officers. The CEC has not also supported the proposal concerning signing of all blank ballot papers by the same two PEC members.

Experts of the campaign “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” believe that such a procedure for the signing of ballot papers would have made potential manipulations more difficult. In practice, ballot papers have been signed not by one pair of PEC members, but by all (each pair signs its portion of ballot papers).

Particular concerns have been provoked by the fact that the CEC has once again dismissed the proposal to describe the process of vote count in detail. Experts of the campaign “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” believe that this may lead to a situation in which the main stage of election process will not be transparent. It is worthy of note that the OSCE ODIHR has repeatedly recommended including clear and detailed rules on how the votes are counted in the Electoral Code.

These concerns have been reinforced by the fact that during the training workshop for PEC members of Maskouski District of Minsk, which was attended by the observer from the “BNF “Adradzhenne” NGO Valiantsina Svyatskaya, PEC members were instructed how to arrange vote count and tabulation of results so that they are fully closed for observation. The workshop was held on 30 November, under the guidance of Deputy Chair of Maskouski District Election Commission, Head of Organizational and Human Resources Department of Maskouski District Administration Alyaksandr Kudzermæu. According to his instructions, the vote count has to be carried in full silence; each PEC member will receive and count his (her) own portion of ballot papers, then write results on a sheet of paper, and hand it over to the PEC chair. Kudzermæu has also stressed that it is necessary “to block all attempts of observers to stand up and to come close to the table. Even in case they will demand ‘show us each ballot paper’ – block them anyway”. Such a method of counting votes has been routinely applied during previous elections.

II. EARLY VOTING

Observers from the regions report continued pressure by management of state institutions and enterprises to their subordinates and students in order to urge them to vote early. During the reporting period, at special meetings at the local executive committees, the ideological staff of institutions and enterprises was instructed to ensure maximum turnout of voters during the early voting period.

At some enterprises, such as Glybokæ Milk Preserve Factory (Vitsebsk region), the management has defined who of their subordinates has to go to early voting.

Calls to vote early have been heard in the working collectives not only from the management of institutions and enterprises, but also from the civil servants, members of the parliament and deputies of local councils. These calls have been usually accompanied by agitation in support of the incumbent president.

Since 3 December, calls to vote early have been broadcast in the city buses in Babruisk (Mahilyou region).

At the same time, during the online press conference arranged by “Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belorussia” newspaper, CEC Chair Yarmoshyna has answered a question concerning responsibility for coercion to early voting by state officials stressing that in such cases one should file a complaint to the Prosecutor’s Office. Yarmoshyna explained that such an action

should be qualified as an administrative offence (she called it a crime) “interference with free expression of the citizen’s will”, which is punishable by a fine.

III. CAMPAIGN EVENTS

On 30 November, the CEC issued a warning to candidates Rymasheuski and Statkevich for violation of electoral legislation during a pre-election rally of 24 November at Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk.

As a result of complaints related to decisions on places where campaign events are allowed, the number of the latter has increased. For instance, Homel City Executive Committee has changed its previous decision of 5 November and instead of 9 places in the least populated quarters of the city allowed campaigning virtually everywhere. At the same time, observers have reported shortage of space on information stands for candidates’ posters in Homel. They have also reported cases of destruction and removal of Rymasheuski’s and Sannikau’s promotional printed materials from the stands.

Meetings of candidates and their authorized representatives with the voters have been held without significant obstacles, but in a situation of limited publicity. For instance, information about a meeting of the candidate Mikalai Statkevich with voters in Baranavichy (Brest region) was published in the local state-run paper “Nash Krai” (on the last page, in a very small font), and on the website of the City Executive Committee only on 2 December, the very day of the meeting.

Appearances of the candidates on radio and TV have been held in accordance with the schedule. In addition, on 4 December, a one-hour candidates’ debate was broadcast live on the First National TV Channel. Nine out of 10 candidates (except the incumbent president) have participated and thus were given additional opportunity to share their thoughts and viewpoints with the electorate as compared to the 2006 election, when there were no TV debates.

State-run broadcast and print mass media have continued to cover the presidential election in a reserved manner. At the same time, they extensively cover preparations for the Fourth All-Belarus People’s Meeting to be held on 6-7 December. The declared aim of the Meeting is to sum up the results of the country’s development in 2006–2010, and “plans for the upcoming five-year period”¹ which strengthens the public perception of election results as pre-determined in favour of the incumbent president.

Many publications in the local state-run print mass media have the same purpose. For instance, Baranavichy paper “Nash Krai” (No 142 of 2 December) published results of the opinion poll among city residents titled “For Stable and Secure Future”. All those who were interviewed said that they would only vote for the incumbent president. An article titled “Are Squares the Place for Politics?” published in the same issue, was dedicated to candidate Andrei Sannikau and was extremely critical of him.

¹ <http://kp.by/online/news/788745/>

IV. OBSTACLES TO INDEPENDENT OBSERVERS

According to the CEC², as of 29 November, 9,587 national observers have been accredited at the election commissions, including 6,315 observers from pro-governmental NGOs “Belaya Rus”, Belarusian National Union of Youth (BRSM), Belarusian Union of Women, Belarusian Public Association of Pensioners, and Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus.

The above-mentioned training workshop for the PEC members of Maskouski district of Minsk has shown for what kind of observation the observers from the pro-governmental NGOs have been prepared. Alexander Kudzermæu requested PEC chairs to ensure presence of “brigades of our observers” of no less than 10 persons at each PEC, to be nominated by “Belaya Rus”, BRSM and Belarusian Union of Women. Kudzermæu also announced that on 2 December, training for the leaders (“foremen”) of these groups would be carried out. The training will be dedicated to “what to do and how to behave in a deadlock situation at a polling station”, i.e. how to counteract independent observers and journalists, and how to compile acts confirming correctness of vote count in case PEC members representing opposition political parties refuse to sign final protocols or file dissenting opinions.

The aim of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" is observation of the election of the President of Belarus, assessment of the electoral process from the viewpoint of Belarusian electoral legislation and international standards of free and democratic elections, and keeping the Belarusian public and international community duly informed about our conclusions. The campaign is independent and politically non-engaged. More information about the campaign may be found in the websites of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" (<http://spring96.org>) and Belarusian Helsinki Committee (<http://www.belhelcom.org>).

² <http://www.rec.gov.by/pdf/prb2010/sved5.pdf>