

No confirmation of official election result possible by independent election monitoring.

Final Declaration of the Campaign “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” in Belarus

Slight improvement of general conditions ascertained

On Sunday, 28th September 2008, the parliamentary elections took place in Belarus. The initiative “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” in which 300 Belarusian election observation experts, lawyers and journalists took part has observed the election campaign in all regions of Belarus from June 10th, 2008 to September 28th, 2008 in all its stages and has reported about it in detail regularly.

This structure was formed by the non-governmental organization European Exchange gGmbH located in Berlin in cooperation with the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Human Rights Center “Viasna”.

The initiative “Human Rights Defenders for Free Election” was able to pursue its activity in general, however, was confronted with hindrance especially at the beginning of the election observation by administrative measures like tax inquiry and intimidation.

In view of the rigid general conditions for candidates of the political opposition to participate in the election the independent local election observation had to focus on discovering:

1. To what extent the candidates of the opposition and independent candidates were considered at the formation of the central and local election commissions.
2. Whether and in which ways the groups of supporters were hindered during the collection of signatures for their candidates.
3. Whether and in which ways the registration of candidates of the opposition and independent candidates for the 110 election districts was obstructed and influenced.
4. Whether the candidates of the opposition and independent candidates were able to conduct their election campaign under fair conditions.
5. Which kind of deficiency of transparency could be ascertained at the vote counting by the election commissions in the polling places
6. Whether and in which ways electronic and print-media operated partial in favor of the regime loyal candidates, and how the candidates of the opposition were commented in the state media.

7. Whether and in which ways this election campaign differed from the previous campaigns.

The initiative of the local impartial election observers "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" has ascertained massive violations of the Belarusian electoral law and international standards during the monitoring of the parliamentary elections such as:

1. The exercising of political pressure on the neutral domestic election observers, detailed tax examinations of human rights organizations immediately after the beginning of the election observation in June 2008, tax examinations of the election observers as well as their family members, prosecution and several arrests of local independent election observers
2. The refusal to grant information to the neutral domestic election observers about the formation of regional and local election commissions and the examination of the assembly of voter lists
3. The intimidation of the oppositional candidates for the regional and local election commissions and the members of the supporter's groups that collected signatures for signing up the oppositional candidates.
4. The preference of government-loyal candidates in the state electronic and print media
5. The pressure on the population to participate in pre-election voting.
6. Missing transparency at the vote counting by not admitting representatives of the opposition into the local election commissions and handling the pre-election vote in an intransparent way.

Summary

The initiative "Human Rights Defenders for Free Election" discovered some positive changes at this election campaign in comparison to the election campaigns of the last years.

The release of political prisoners in Belarus has led to a general improvement of the fearful climate in the country. The majority of the candidates – also the independent ones and the candidates of the opposition – were able to produce their campaign material and distribute it to the population mostly unhindered. The participants of the demonstration which has taken place in the evening of the Election Day in Minsk didn't face any hindrance or physical threat in comparison to the demonstrations of the last years.

On the other hand, serious irregularities were ascertained at the execution of this election:

The process of forming the election commissions –in particular the formation of the local commissions carrying out the vote counting - was intransparent. Representatives of the

independent or oppositional candidates were practically not represented in the local election commissions. The pressure on voters to take part in the pre-election vote and the insufficient admission of observers to the elections has neither corresponded to international standards nor to the Belarusian law. These listed irregularities and the massive impediments of the observers at the vote counting do not allow the confirmation of the officially stated election results of the Central Election Commission.