



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION Russian Federation, Presidential Election – 4 March 2012

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Moscow, 5 March 2012 - This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is the result of a common endeavour involving the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

Tiny Kox (Netherlands) headed the PACE delegation. Tonino Picula (Croatia), Head of the OSCE PA Delegation, was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator to lead the short term observer mission. Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini (Switzerland) is the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM), deployed from 26 January 2012.

This assessment is made to determine whether this election complied with OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards, as well as with national legislation. In some regions of the country, local elections were held concurrently with the presidential elections and were observed only to the extent that they may have impacted on the conduct of the latter. This statement of preliminary findings and conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the election process; in particular, the tabulation and announcement of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints and appeals. The OSCE/ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some eight weeks after the completion of the election process. The OSCE PA will present its report at the Bureau Meeting in Copenhagen on 23 April 2012. The PACE delegation will present its report at its April part-session.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

On 4 March, five candidates stood in the presidential election. Although all contestants were able to campaign unhindered, the conditions for the campaign were clearly skewed in favour of one candidate. Also, overly restrictive candidate registration requirements limited genuine competition. While all candidates had access to media, one candidate, the current Prime Minister, was given clear advantage in the coverage. State resources were mobilised in his support. The election campaign was characterized by continuing and generally unobstructed large-scale protests over allegations of fraud from the 2011 State Duma elections. Demands for honest elections by citizens and candidates led to greater involvement in observation efforts to enhance the integrity of the process. Observers assessed voting positively overall; however, the process deteriorated during the count due to procedural irregularities.

Five candidates stood in this election, including the current Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, three leaders of registered political parties and one self-nominated candidate, a prominent Russian businessman. The Central Election Commission (CEC) rejected eleven other nominees, two of which were not registered due to shortcomings established during the verification of their support signatures. Many EOM interlocutors criticized the signature requirements as excessively burdensome and nearly impossible to comply within the short timeframe provided.

The broadcast media did not provide balanced coverage of all candidates overall, contrary to the legal requirements. Mr. Putin dominated the campaign with frequent appearances in the media. While newscasts on television channels monitored by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM

covered the daily activities of each contestant, they were outweighed by lengthy items about him, both as a Prime Minister and as a candidate, and with a series of documentaries praising his achievements. This created unequal conditions for the candidates giving Mr. Putin clear advantage.

The start of the electoral campaign was marked by large-scale, peaceful countrywide demonstrations calling for fair elections. Following the 4 February protests, the campaign featured a clear divide between groups supporting Mr. Putin and the new opposition protest movement bringing together a diverse spectrum of participants. The authorities allowed such protests to take place without undue interference, in line with their commitment to freedom of assembly. In response to the protests, President Medvedev proposed new laws to the State Duma to modify and simplify registration of political parties and presidential candidates in the future.

The presidential campaign was marked by significant civic engagement, including an increased focus on election observation. Positively, the authorities did not hinder such developments. As the law does not allow for domestic observers other than those affiliated with candidates and parties, a large number of observers were deployed as journalists or as observers on behalf of presidential candidates.

Following widespread allegations of fraud during the 2011 State Duma elections, web cameras were installed in almost all polling stations across the country and one-third of polling stations used transparent ballot boxes as measures intended to increase transparency. While the introduction of web cameras was presented as a measure to improve transparency, on election night, cameras were not able to capture important elements of the count and thus did not fulfil the expectations associated with the webcasts.

There was an evident mobilization of individuals and resources in support of Mr. Putin's campaign, which was observed by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM. In several regions, campaign events participants told that they had been ordered to take part by their superiors. Various levels of public institutions were instructing their subordinate structures to organize and facilitate Mr. Putin's campaign events. Local authorities also used official communication, such as their institutional websites or newspapers, to facilitate Mr. Putin's campaign.

Despite the challenge of organizing elections for nearly 110 million voters residing in a territory comprising nine time zones, the administrative preparations for the presidential election proceeded efficiently. There was, however, a general lack of confidence among many interlocutors in the independence of election officials at all levels, mostly due to their perceived affiliation with local administration and the governing party.

Few complaints were filed with the CEC and lower-level election commissions during the campaign period. Candidates, political parties and other interlocutors noted a general reluctance to seek legal redress because they did not trust the legal system and did not believe that an effective remedy would be provided.

On election day, voting was assessed positively overall; however, procedural irregularities were observed. The process deteriorated during the count which was assessed negatively in nearly one-third of polling stations observed due to procedural irregularities. During the tabulation, observers reported that in some cases the data entry process was poorly organized and lacked transparency.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background

The 4 March 2012 presidential election was called by the Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, on 25 November 2011. Preceding this determination, President Dmitry Medvedev announced on 24 September 2011 that he would not seek re-election. On the same day, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced his intention to stand for a third term¹ on behalf of the governing All-Russian Political Party “United Russia” (ER).² This move was widely perceived as being a prearranged hand over of power and contributed to widespread public discontent.

The presidential election took place shortly after the December 2011 State Duma (parliamentary) elections, which were marred by allegations of fraud and were followed by numerous and ongoing demonstrations across the country. Citizens from a broad range of political backgrounds questioned the accuracy of the results, calling for fair elections and comprehensive changes to the political system.

Legal Framework and Election System

The conduct of presidential elections is primarily regulated by the Constitution, the Law on Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in a Referendum (Law on Basic Guarantees), and the Law on the Election of the President of the Russian Federation (Presidential Election Law). The legal framework is comprehensive in terms of covering most crucial elements of an electoral process. Its complexity, however, allows different state institutions to implement it in an arbitrary manner.³

The president is directly elected in a single nationwide constituency. If no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the valid votes cast, a second round takes place between the two candidates who gained the highest numbers of votes. A constitutional amendment from December 2008, which took effect with this presidential election, extended the presidential term from four to six years.

Candidate Registration

The presidential election was contested by five candidates. Four of the candidates were nominated by political parties currently represented in the parliament. They included Sergey Mironov from Fair Russia (SR), Vladimir Putin from ER, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy from the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), and Gennady Zyuganov from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF). Mikhail Prokhorov, a prominent businessman, ran as a self-nominated candidate.

Eleven other nominees were denied registration on the grounds of ineligibility or failure to comply with the registration requirements; two of the rejected nominees were women. Self-nominated Dmitry Mezentsev and “Yabloko” party nominee Grigory Yavlinskiy were denied registration following the verification of their support signatures.⁴ Mr. Yavlinskiy

¹ Although the law prevents an individual from holding more than two consecutive terms, it is silent regarding non-consecutive terms. Vladimir Putin served as president from 2000-2008.

² All political party acronyms correspond to the parties’ names in Russian.

³ For further details on the legal framework, see the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on the 5 December 2011 State Duma elections, www.osce.org/odihr/86959, p. 4.

⁴ The CEC conducts a verification process for the signatures submitted. A sample of at least 20 per

stated that his non-registration was politically motivated. He appealed the CEC's decision to the Supreme Court, which ruled against the complainant on 8 February 2012. The candidate did not pursue further appeal.⁵

Requirements for the collecting and submitting the required two million signatures in the short timeframe prescribed by law, as well as the criteria that allow for invalidation, render candidate registration onerous.⁶

Election Administration

Despite the challenge of organizing elections for nearly 110 million voters residing in a territory that includes nine time zones, the administrative preparations for the presidential election were carried out efficiently. The election was administered by one million election officials comprising the Central Election Commission (CEC), 83 Subject Election Commissions (SEC), 2,746 Territorial Election Commissions (TEC) and some 94,500 Precinct Election Commissions (PEC). The CEC, SECs and TECs are all permanent bodies. PECs are appointed anew before each election. While there are only four women in the 15-member CEC, women were well represented in SECs and TECs and chaired over 70 per cent of visited PECs.

In addition to regular polling stations, 385 polling stations were opened abroad. Special polling stations were established in hospitals, sanatoriums and other places of temporary residence (1,504), at railway stations (83), airports (31), and in detention centers (123). Two weeks before the election, early voting commenced for voters residing in very remote areas.⁷

Widespread public criticism of the CEC after the 2011 State Duma elections had an impact on its work. Measures were undertaken to increase the transparency of the electoral process including the introduction of transparent ballot boxes in over 30 per cent of polling stations and the installation of web cameras in almost all polling stations across the country (see Web Cameras and New Voting Technologies). During CEC sessions, diverging views were

cent of the required number of signatures is verified. In cases where five per cent or more of these are found to be invalid, verification of at least an additional 10 per cent is carried out. Candidates may be denied registration if more than 5 per cent of the total number of signatures selected for verification is found invalid or if the total number of valid signatures is less than required two million. According to the law, signatures can be considered invalid for a variety of reasons: mistakes or technical inaccuracies, omissions of a signatory's full address, omission of the form's completion date, filling in the form in pencil, or making corrections to the form.

⁵ Mr. Yavlinskiy submitted 2,086,050 support signatures and the CEC verified 600,000 of these. Of the 153,938 signatures that were invalidated (25.66 per cent of the total number selected), 137,492 were rejected on the basis that they had not been submitted in original format. In his complaint to the Supreme Court, Mr. Yavlinskiy argued that the CEC misinterpreted the Presidential Election Law by not accepting such forms. The Court upheld the CEC's decision, reasoning that the law requires the submission of original forms.

⁶ Signature collection requirements have been a subject of continued criticism and have been previously commented upon, among others, by the OSCE/ODIHR as "an unreasonable hurdle, which results in a disparity of [...] conditions for candidates, and one that could invite malpractice." See the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on 2004 presidential election, www.osce.org/odihr/elections/russia/33101, p. 10. In addition, see paragraph I.1.3.ii of the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, which provides that "the law should not require collection of the signatures of more than one per cent of voters in the constituency concerned."

⁷ Some 154,000 voters took part in early voting. The decisions on where early voting needs to be organized are taken by SECs and by the CEC for voting abroad.

more frequently expressed by CEC members, particularly with regard to the registration of candidates and the adjudication of complaints pertaining to local elections.⁸

Most election officials met across the country tended to be experienced. Yet, there was a general lack of confidence among many interlocutors in their impartiality due to frequent allegations that many of them were directly or indirectly linked with the governing party. The formation of PECs drew particular criticism from other political parties. While the CEC data showed that ER, KPRF and SR had similar numbers of PEC members, in many areas visited by OSCE/ODIHR observers, ER had a clear advantage in the appointment of PEC chairpersons. Moreover, even those not officially nominated by ER were perceived as biased by other parties. Being employees of various public institutions, these chairpersons were deemed economically dependent and thus vulnerable to possible pressure from the local administration that appointed them. As such, the principle of the law requiring independence of election commissions from state and local officials was generally perceived as not having been met.⁹

There were no significant concerns raised by interlocutors regarding the accuracy of voter lists. These were prepared on the basis of citizens' residence information provided by local administration.

Web Cameras and New Voting Technologies

Following Prime Minister Putin's proposal after the recent State Duma elections, polling stations across the country were equipped with two web cameras each, one providing a general view of the polling station and the other focusing on the ballot box. During the count, the latter focused on the counting procedures. The corresponding CEC instruction stated that the web cameras should be arranged in a way that the secrecy of the vote would not be violated.

On election day, web cameras were installed in almost all polling stations observed. The public was able to access the web cameras' live video feed on a special website without restrictions. On the argument that partial results should not be revealed before the end of polling, the live feed of the counting process was delayed until the last poll closed. In line with the CEC instruction, the footage is to be archived at data centres and is to be kept for one year until the expiration of the deadline for election results contestation. According to the Ministry of Telecom and Mass Communications, citizens will have access to archived footage.

The introduction of web cameras sparked a public discussion. While some considered it a useful tool for increasing transparency, other interlocutors, including some presidential candidates doubted that web cameras could ensure the election's integrity as they cannot capture all elements of the electoral process, including mobile voting and tabulation of results. While the introduction of web cameras could be considered as a measure to improve transparency, such a measure cannot be a substitute for observation. On election night, cameras were not able to capture important elements of the count and thus did not fulfil the expectations associated with the webcasts.

⁸ Local elections were held concurrently with the presidential election in 22,990 polling stations across Russia.

⁹ See article 7, paragraph 2 of the Presidential Election Law.

Two types of new voting technologies were used during this election. Ballot scanning machines were used in 5,233 polling stations, a slight increase compared to the 2011 State Duma elections. Such gradual introduction of new voting technologies is in line with good practice. The use of ballot scanners was assessed positively by the majority of presidential candidates as a safeguard against incidental or deliberate changes in results protocol. The second type of technology was touch-screen electronic voting systems, which were used in 333 polling stations, including 22 polling stations abroad.

Some challenges regarding new voting technologies remain, including the lack of mandatory random manual recounts and of independent certification.¹⁰

Campaign Environment

The start of the electoral campaign was marked by peaceful countrywide demonstrations calling for fair elections. The authorities allowed such protests to take place without undue interference, in line with their commitment to freedom of assembly. On 4 February, rallies took place across the country against alleged fraud during the 2011 State Duma elections and for political reform. On the same day, rallies in support of Prime Minister Putin were organized in many locations, including a large rally in Moscow.

The campaign was marked by a clear divide between groups supporting the Prime Minister and opposition protest movements with a diverse spectrum of participants. Of the five presidential candidates, Mr. Putin dominated the campaign with frequent appearances both as candidate and as Prime Minister. There was a public perception shared by OSCE/ODIHR interlocutors that voters had no real alternative to the election of Vladimir Putin.

In response to the protests, reforms of the political system were announced by the authorities. Some of the suggested changes included the reintroduction of direct gubernatorial elections, loosening political party registration requirements, and a reduction in the number of support signatures required for candidate registration. Some of the proposed reforms were taken up by some presidential candidates in their programmatic platforms.

All five presidential candidates addressed issues of social inequality, corruption and the need to strengthen the rule of law in their campaigns. Some candidate programmes promoted political change, while Prime Minister Putin emphasized the importance of stability through continuity. While all candidates addressed national minority issues, one candidate resorted to nationalistic rhetoric. Questions related to women's participation were not given profile in candidates' programmes.

There was also an evident mobilization of individuals and resources in support of Mr. Putin's campaign, which was observed by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM. In several regions, campaign events participants told that they had been ordered to take part by their superiors.¹¹ Various levels of public institutions were instructing their subordinate structures to organize and facilitate Mr. Putin's campaign events.¹² Local authorities also

¹⁰ See OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on the 4 December 2011 State Duma Elections, p. 7.

¹¹ Teachers confirmed to the OSCE/ODIHR EOM observers forced attendance of Mr. Putin's rallies held in Krasnodar and Lipetsk. University students reported having been asked to attend campaign events of Mr. Putin in Tomsk, Khabarovsk and Novosibirsk.

¹² In Voronezh, an email was sent to hospitals and healthcare institutions by the local health department giving instructions to organize internal meetings in support of Mr. Putin. In Orenburg, an

used official communication, such as their institutional websites or newspapers, to facilitate Mr. Putin's campaign.

In these elections, traditional campaign techniques such as leaflets, posters and billboards played a minor role. Contestants relied more on campaign tools such as television ads and the Internet to inform voters. Social media turned into an alternative forum for political debate and a new tool for mobilizing and organizing people. Overall, the campaign was barely visible outside Moscow and Saint Petersburg, although candidates were allowed to campaign unhindered.

Media

The broadcast media did not provide balanced coverage of the contestants overall, contrary to the legal requirements.¹³ While newscasts on television stations monitored by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM covered the daily activities of every election contestant, they were outweighed by the extensive coverage of Vladimir Putin's daily activities, both as a Prime Minister and as a candidate.¹⁴ This, together with regular broadcasts of documentaries praising his achievements and articles written by him, created unequal conditions for candidates.

State-owned broadcast and print media complied with their legal obligations to allocate free time and space to the candidates. However, contrary to the legal requirements, most free time was allotted outside of peak audience periods. In addition to the allocation of free time to candidates, the legislation also grants free airtime/space to every political party that nominated a candidate. This resulted in self-nominated candidate Mikhail Prokhorov receiving significantly less time and space than other contestants.¹⁵

Half of free airtime on state media was dedicated to debates. Following the announcement that Mr. Putin would not participate in the debates in person in the national media, but would delegate authorized representatives, other candidates adopted a similar approach to some of the debates.

The protest movement received some coverage in the broadcast media. However, there were numerous allegations that news reports did not accurately reflect the situation and often portrayed daily events in a partial manner. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM noted several instances of critical comments about the authorities being cut from popular talk shows and

All-Russian Pedagogical Assembly sent letters to directors of schools instructing them to organize meetings with teachers in support of Mr. Putin and to report back on the attendance. Local enterprises and public entities organized transportation for participants of Mr. Putin's rallies in Chelyabinsk, Samara, Saint Petersburg, Irkutsk, Orenburg and Moscow.

¹³ Article 8(4) of the Presidential Election Law guarantees equal access for all contestants to the media. Article 46(2) requires that all information materials published or distributed by the mass media should be objective and accurate, and respect the equality of candidates. Article 46(5) requires that no preferences be given in the newscasts to any candidate, in particular with regard to the length of time or space devoted to the coverage of election campaigns.

¹⁴ The OSCE/ODIHR EOM monitoring covered seven television channels. These included state owned *First Channel*, *Russia 1*, *Russia 24* and *TV Center*, and private *NTV*, *Channel 5* and *Ren-TV*. In addition, six newspapers were monitored, including state owned *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, and private *Argumenti i Fakti*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Novaya Gazeta* and *Kommersant*.

¹⁵ The corresponding provisions of the law disadvantage independent candidates and are not in conformity with paragraph 7.8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document which requires states to ensure that "no legal or administrative obstacle stands in the way of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis."

one programme was cancelled.¹⁶ In addition, investigations were conducted by government agencies against journalists, media outlets or businessmen involved in funding independent media.¹⁷ Such interference with the work of media was perceived by journalists and media experts to be a consequence of the increasingly open criticism of the government on some channels and newspapers.

The results of media monitoring carried out by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM showed that broadcast media monitored clearly favoured Mr. Putin. In addition to the coverage of his campaign, extensive coverage was provided to his activities in his capacity of the Prime Minister.¹⁸ The tone of coverage was mainly positive, while other candidates were mostly covered in a neutral manner. The *First Channel* allocated some 61 per cent of news coverage to Mr. Putin (37 per cent as Prime Minister and 24 per cent as a candidate), while other contestants received between 9 and 11 per cent of coverage each. A similar picture was also noted on *TV Center*, which is owned by the Moscow City Government. The newscasts of *Russia 1* and *Russia 24* provided a more balanced picture, although still devoted a significant amount of coverage to Mr. Putin - both as Prime Minister and as a candidate. He received 42 and 48 per cent of coverage respectively, including 24 and 25 per cent of coverage in his capacity of Prime Minister. Other candidates received between 9 and 19 per cent of news coverage on both channels.

Private broadcast media outlets monitored allocated between 69 and 88 per cent of the coverage to Mr. Putin as both candidate and Prime Minister, thus virtually disregarding the campaign activities of other candidates. In addition, over 25 broadcasts of documentaries were aired by the monitored media outlets praising the achievements of Mr. Putin as a Prime Minister and during his preceding terms as a President.

State owned *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, as well as tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda* demonstrated their overall support of Mr. Putin, covering him as candidate and Prime Minister, largely ignoring the activities of other candidates. *Novaya Gazeta* displayed a different approach by heavily criticizing him. *Kommersant* and *Argumenti i Fakti* covered the activities of all election contestants while still allocating more coverage to Mr. Putin.

During the campaign, seven articles written by Prime Minister Putin, outlining his long-term strategy for the development of the country were published in a different newspaper every week.¹⁹ These articles were not counted as part of his free space allocation.²⁰ Other election contestants did not receive similar amounts of free space in those media outlets.

¹⁶ The talk show “*Gosdep*” on MTV was cancelled on 14 February, allegedly due to the planned participation of a famous opposition blogger, Alexey Navalny.

¹⁷ *Rain TV*, which is mainly available via the Internet, was on 16 February 2012 requested by the Prosecutor’s Office to provide information on sources of funding for live broadcasts of opposition rallies. A financial investigation of the activities of the bank owned by a financier of *Novaya Gazeta* took place in February 2012 and led to the freezing of accounts used for funding the newspaper.

¹⁸ Article 35 of the Law on Mass Media and Articles 6 and 8 of the Law “Order of the State-funded media coverage of the activities of State officials” oblige state-funded media to broadcast and publish official statements made by state authorities and to cover “important facts about the activities of the federal government.”

¹⁹ These included articles: “Russia muscles up – the challenges we must rise to face” in *Izvestia* newspaper published on 16 January; “The ethnicity issue” (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*; 23 January); “Economic tasks” (*Vedomosti*; 30 January); “Democracy and the quality of government” (*Kommersant*; 6 February); “Building justice: A social policy for Russia” (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*; 13 February); “Being strong: National security guarantees for Russia” (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*; 20 February); and “Russia and the transforming world” (*Moskovskie Novosti*; 27 February). These

Complaints and Appeals

Few complaints were filed with either the CEC or lower-level election commissions during the campaign period. Candidates, political parties and other interlocutors stated that there is general reluctance to seek legal redress due to: disbelief that effective remedies would be provided; perception that election commissions and courts were not impartial arbiters of election disputes; lack of political will on the part of government agencies to follow-up on complaints filed; and lack of resources to pursue complaints.

Of those complaints that were filed, the majority concerned the following topics: unequal access to media by Mr. Putin because of his status as Prime Minister; misuse of office and official position by him; the production and distribution of campaign materials without indication of who produced and paid for it; and the illegality of campaigning or campaign materials for or against a candidate.

The definition of ‘campaigning’ was an issue in several complaints filed by KPRF and LDPR, alleging that Mr. Putin was receiving favorable treatment by the media. One such complaint concerned several articles written by Mr. Putin. According to the CEC working group, these articles did not constitute campaign material within the definition on the Presidential Election Law because they did not contain a direct appeal to vote for or against any candidate.

The restrictions in the Presidential Election Law on taking advantage of one’s office or official position for campaign purposes apply to all elected officials whether or not they are candidates. However, several candidates complained that the law created an unfair advantage for Mr. Putin since he is not required to suspend his activities as Prime Minister during the campaign period. They alleged that media coverage of many of Mr. Putin’s activities as Prime Minister contained elements of campaigning.²¹ All of these complaints/applications were dismissed as not grounded.

The role of courts during the campaign period was minimal.

Domestic and International Election Observers

The presidential campaign was marked by significant civic mobilization, including an increased focus on election observation as a result of the allegations of fraud during the 2011 State Duma elections. Positively, the authorities did not hinder such developments. Although the law does not foresee domestic observation by civil society organizations,

articles were also reprinted in regional print media. *Vedomosti* newspaper announced that they would pay Mr. Putin for the publication of his article. Mr. Putin’s office suggested the newspaper to donate the remuneration for charity.

²⁰ These articles were also published in a book format with considerable circulation without indication that it was paid from the candidate’s campaign fund. The books were distributed during one of Mr. Putin’s meetings with his proxies in Moscow.

²¹ Several complaints were filed with the CEC concerning the fact that Mr. Putin had refused to take time off in order to campaign, what resulted in him being granted privileged access to the media. The CEC dismissed all such complaints. In addition, representatives of Zhirinovskiy and Zyuganov filed a number of complaints with the CEC against unequal coverage in the broadcast media. All such complaints were also dismissed.

observers representing such organizations were deployed as journalists or as observers formally nominated by presidential candidates.²²

Different observer groups and candidates co-operated and joined monitoring efforts to achieve maximum coverage of the country and effectiveness. A significant number of observers were deployed by the League of Voters, a grassroots civil society initiative that emerged from the protest movement after the State Duma elections. The League concluded co-operation agreements with candidates Prokhorov, Mironov, and Zyuganov, as well as with the “Yabloko” party. These agreements envisaged the possibility to deploy League of Voters’ observers on behalf of the above candidates and co-operation on a joint project, “*Svodniy Protokol*”, among other things. In the framework of that project, a consolidated database of reports and PEC protocols collected by observers was meant to be created in order to compare them with the results protocols, as published by the CEC.

The CEC accredited several international observation groups for this election. Apart from the OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE PA and PACE, sizeable missions were deployed by the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Co-operation Organization.

Election Day

Voting was assessed as good and very good in 95 per cent of polling stations visited; however, the process deteriorated during the count that was assessed as bad and very bad in almost one-third of polling stations observed due to procedural irregularities.

The majority of polling stations opened on time and the process was assessed positively by most observers, although minor delays in opening were noted in 20 per cent of polling stations observed. In 8 per cent of polling stations, the enlarged copy of the result protocol was not posted as required by the law. Over 5 per cent of observers were restricted in their observation of opening procedures.

Voting procedures were generally followed, although irregularities were noted, including cases of group, proxy and multiple voting. In 5 per cent of polling stations visited, ballot boxes were not properly sealed. Illegal campaigning was noticed outside of 4 per cent of polling stations. There were also some indications of buses transporting groups of voters to vote at multiple polling stations, raising concerns about the mechanisms for adding people to the voter lists. Six per cent of polling stations were overcrowded, which at times undermined secrecy. There were some observations of a high number of voters voting by mobile ballot box. Access to over half of polling stations visited was considered difficult for those with disabilities. Formal complaints were filed in 4 per cent of polling stations observed.

Candidate representatives were present in 95 per cent of polling stations visited, the majority of them representing Mr. Putin (80 per cent) and Mr. Zyuganov (72 per cent). Many observers proved to be attentive, active and informed. However, in 7 per cent of polling stations, observers did not have a clear view of the voting process and isolated cases of threats to domestic observers were reported.

²² In addition to election day observation, many observer groups operated hotlines for reporting on alleged violations. Some groups also observed web camera broadcasts of the voting and counting procedures.

In a number of polling stations observed, voters not residing in a precinct were added to voter lists shortly before the election upon written application as permitted by the law. However, the law also requires that such voters should be marked accordingly in voter lists in their precinct of origin. As this was not always done, such a practice created potential for multiple voting.

Paper-ballot scanning equipment was used in some 80 polling stations visited. Some 17 per cent of voters who voted during the observation in these polling stations required assistance with casting their ballots. A limited observation of polling stations with touch-screen machines showed that in some cases machines were positioned very close to each other, also undermining secrecy.

Of 98 counts observed, 29 were assessed as bad and very bad. Observers reported that PEC members did not always follow correct procedures. Also, there were instances of ballot box stuffing. In 27 counts observed, ballots were not shown to all present, and they were not counted transparently, one by one, in 28 cases. PECs did not count the signatures of voters who voted in 15 cases and did not record the number of ballots issued to voters using the mobile ballot box in 18 counts observed. Thus, crucial figures related to the count could not always be established with confidence in their accuracy.

In 24 counts, the mobile ballots were not mixed with the ballots from the stationary box, as prescribed by the law. Completed result protocols were not shown to one of the web cameras as required in 21 observations and results were not read out loud in 18 cases. Also, the signed protocol was not posted in 31 polling stations observed. Such transparency measures were thus undermined. Observers reported some cases of restrictions to their observation. There were also a few reports of extended breaks during the count.

The tabulation was observed in over 70 TECs and the process in 11 of them was assessed as bad and very bad. In these cases, observers reported poor organization of data entry, overcrowding, insufficient transparency, and instances of changing of PEC protocols by TECs.

*The English version of this report is the only official document.
Unofficial translation is available in Russian.*

Mission Information & Acknowledgements

Moscow, 5 March 2012 – The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) opened in Moscow on 26 January with 15 experts in the core team based in the capital and 40 long-term observers deployed to 19 regional centres.

On election day, some 262 observers were deployed, including observers from the OSCE/ODIHR, a 36-member delegation of PACE, and a 9-member delegation of the OSCE PA. Voting was observed in 1,078 polling stations. Counting was observed in 98 polling stations. The tabulation process was observed in over 72 TECs.

The observers wish to thank the CEC of the Russian Federation for the invitation to observe the election. The observers also express their appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its support and other State institutions, local authorities, political parties and civil society organizations for their co-operation during the course of the observation.

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