



CIVIL CAMPAIGN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FOR FREE ELECTIONS

Elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus of the sixth convocation

Observation is carried out by activists of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Human Rights Center "Viasna" in the framework of the campaign *Human Rights Defenders For Free Elections*

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CONCLUSIONS

- nomination groups have been collecting signatures by means of pickets and door-to-door canvassing without significant obstacles;
- the process of collecting signatures was once again accompanied by abuse of administrative resources, but not as extensively as in earlier elections;
- registered political parties have been able to nominate their candidates for the House of Representatives;
- the elections continue to be unobtrusive for the Belarusian society; government-run media confine themselves to publishing official materials and articles related to the potential pro-government candidates.

COLLECTION OF SIGNATURES

Nomination groups continued to collect signatures by means of pickets and door-to-door canvassing. There has been little public interest in the election campaign. The *Belaya Rus* NGO has been actively engaged in the collection of signatures in support of the pro-government nominees. Administrative resources have been abused for the promotion of pro-government nominees.

Halina Filipovich, acting member of the House of Representatives for the Svietlahorsk electoral district No. 46 and chair of the district branch of the Belarusian Women's Union, has made extensive use of administrative resources: managers of local government-owned enterprises have been advising their subordinates to put their signatures in her support of the nominee and ignore the other contenders. Signatures for Ms. Filipovich have been collected at the Svietlahorsk Pulp and Paper Factory, JSC *Svietlahorskchimvalakno*, and the Svietlahorsk Reinforced Concrete Products Plant. An observer delegated by the BRSM NGO was reportedly collecting signatures at a picket in support of Halina Filipovich.

Several instances of forced collection of signatures for the nomination of Valiantsina Roahanets, editor of the *Slucki Kraj* newspaper, were documented at the local state-owned housing enterprise.

The nomination group of Liudmila Kananovich, deputy chair of the Maladziečna district executive committee, abused administrative resources: signatures were collected during working hours at the state-run enterprises.

In Orša, teachers were recalled from their annual leaves to collect signatures in support of Liudmila Dabrynina, incumbent member of the House of Representatives for electoral district No. 26. The same situation was documented in Hrodna: teachers have been collecting signatures in support of Liliya Kirak, head teacher at local school No. 13, who is running in electoral district No. 51.

In Polack, a visitor to a local clinic was offered to sign for the nomination of Natallia Huivik, incumbent member of the House of Representatives for electoral district No. 28. During the incident at the doctor's office, a nurse assisted in illegal canvassing by filling in the signature sheets. After the patient complained to the CEC, a response said that no violations of the electoral legislation was registered: a member of the nomination group went to work in her spare time, while the buildings of medical institutions are not on the list of places where collecting signatures is forbidden.

In Vierchniadzvinsk, the nomination group of a pro-governmental candidate includes people working at major enterprises. 120 persons have been collecting signatures for the nomination of Andrei Yunitsyn, head of local telecom center. As a result, each member is tasked to collect only 10 signatures at their workplace.

Administrative resources continue to be abused in collecting signatures in support of Tatsiana Marachkova, chair of the Kryčaŭ District Council of Deputies and member of the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus, who is running in electoral district No. 83. The managers of JSC *Kryčaŭcementašyfier* have been involved in the process during their working hours.

Various regions show different levels of activity by potential candidates and their nomination groups. In Sluck, the campaign is very active: several nomination groups of future candidates (Artsiom Malinouski, Alina Nahornaya, Valiantsina Razhanets) have been actively involved in the collection of signatures. The nomination group of Katsiaryna Shust have been using election opportunities to campaign for renaming a city street. Observers report several pickets by a number of nominees (Nahornaya, Shust, Razhanets). Local independent media have expanded their coverage of the elections. At the same time, since the beginning of registration procedures, none of the local nomination groups has arranged a single picket to collect signatures. According to a local contender, Mikhail Valynets, few people sign for his nomination collection, despite the large number of campaigners (57 persons).

The election commissions of Minsk received complaints about the excessive activity of separate nomination groups who are collecting signatures in the dormitories owned by local state-run enterprises. In this regard, chairman of the Minsk City Election Commission, Siarhei Khilman, said at a meeting of the commission that members of nomination groups had to abide by the rules of visiting dormitories. An order was issued, which allowed collecting signatures only in the halls of the first floors, as well as near the buildings of local dormitories.

Opposition activists Yury Kazakevich (Baranavičy electoral district No. 5) and Mikalai Charnavus (Baranavičy electoral district No. 6) received warnings for "illegal campaigning", namely using

slogans while collecting signatures (including on clothing). This put them at a disadvantage with the pro-government contenders, who has yet faced no penalties for using slogans in their canvassing activities. Both warnings were eventually cancelled on July 19 after the decision were appealed to the election authorities.

Several executive committees and district administrations have already decided on determining the locations for election campaigning (venues for meetings with voters and premises for such meetings), and the placement of election advertising.

A report presented by the KGB chairman Valery Vakulchyk to President Lukashenka on July 18 suggests that the State Security Committee has been engaged in monitoring the political aspects of the election campaign. Valery Vakulchyk said that “the level of public interest in the applicants from among the representatives of various opposition organizations was low.”

NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES BY POLITICAL PARTIES

The political parties involved in the election have held congresses to nominate their candidates for the Parliament.

Party	Number of nominated representatives
Republican Party of Labor and Justice	23
Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada)	34
Belarusian Left Party <i>Fair World</i>	50
Communist Party of Belarus	59
United Civil Party	70 ¹
BPF	72
Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus	110

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ELECTIONS

Chairman of the Supervisory Board for the Observance of the Procedures and Rules of Media Coverage of the Elections, Deputy Minister of Information Ihar Lutski explained the rules for the use of social networks during the election campaign: “the candidate is not prohibited to use social networks for campaigning purposes, provided that such activities do not require financial resources.” Experts of the *Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections* campaign believe that in the absence of detailed procedures the application of such rules in practice will cause numerous challenges.

As before, the state media provide little coverage of the campaign, which is extremely overweighted in favor of pro-government contenders. The content of a number of publications is regarded as hidden campaigning for such candidates.

On July 20, the *Vesnik Mahiliova* newspaper published an article entitled *Head Physician of Mahilioŭ Goes to Parliament*, which supported the nomination of Aliaksandr Staravoitau, head physician of the city’s central clinic.

On the same day, *Hrodzienskaja Praŭda* published an article entitled *Trade Unions Are Always There* covering the activities of a potential candidate, chairman of the Hrodna regional branch

¹ Including approx. 30 representatives of the organizing committee of the Belarusian Christian Democracy.

of the trade union of government employees Valery Sauko, who is running in the Ščučyn-based electoral district No. 60.

Another instance of hidden campaigning is an article entitled *Dedication to 75th Anniversary of Heroism*, which was published in the Kryčaŭskaje Žyccio newspaper. The publication tells about Tatsiana Marachkava, chair of the Kryčaŭ District Council of Deputies. Local cable television showed several programs in which Ms. Marachkava told about her participation in the All-Belarusian People's Assembly.

Navapolack cable TV Channel *Vektar* aired a story about pro-government candidates Vadzim Dzeviatouski and Volha Damaskina. Opposition contender Mikalai Manokhin only appeared for a few seconds, although he had been interviewed by the Channel's reporter.

On July 18, the website gomelbest.com published an article entitled *Weird Company*, which in an insulting manner referred to the collection of signatures by one of the local opposition contenders.

ELECTION OBSERVATION

The country's election commissions have accredited 376 observers. 34 persons represent political parties, 305 — public associations. In particular, *Belaya Rus* is represented by 60 accredited observers, and the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) — 60 persons, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee — 48 observers, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus — 43 representatives. Another 35 people have been accredited as observers by submitting individual applications, two were delegated by labor collectives.

In addition, the CEC has accredited 57 observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States, including 8 persons from the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of CIS Member States.

According to Siarhei Klishevich, Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, BRSM will delegate two observers for each polling station, i.e. 11,942 persons in total.

So far, observers nominated by the pro-government organizations demonstrate little activity.