



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FOR FREE ELECTIONS

Elections of deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the seventh convocation

Analytical weekly report on the election observation results: August 12-17

The observation of elections for the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus is carried out by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Viasna Human Rights Center within the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections."

SUMMARY

- the electoral campaign is characterized by a calm atmosphere, the preparation for elections is not covered widely in the media. In this setting, under notice come the activities of the chair of the Central Election Commission Lidziya Yarmoshyna, who appeared quite often in the media in the reporting period;
- in general, the provisions of the CEC Resolution No. 27 are followed: "Election 2019" banners are placed on the websites of executive committees, the information is posted in full compliance with the requirements of the CEC. However, we should note the absence of banners on the Belarusian language versions of some websites of the Hrodna district executive committees;
- prospective candidates and political parties do not show significant pre-election activity. However, the actions of individual activists in the provinces contain elements of covert election campaigning.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

During the reporting period, following the CEC Resolution No.27 of August 6, 2019, new sections "Election 2019" have been created on all websites of local executive and administrative bodies¹. It is worth noting that all websites of local executive committees comply with the requirements of this Resolution regarding placement of the "Election 2019" banner and the specification of information to be placed on the sites. Meanwhile, the Belarusian language versions of certain executive committees' websites do not feature the "Election 2019" banner. The corresponding section is missing on the Belarusian language versions of the websites of Vaŭkavysk, Hrodna, Dziatlava, Zieĺva, and other executive committees.

¹ The Resolution No.27 of August 6, 2019 "On informing citizens about the activities on the preparation and holding of the elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the seventh convocation."

THE ELECTION COVERAGE IN THE MEDIA

The state media continue to cover the campaign: information about the main events and constituencies, the nomination of representatives in the regional election commissions, etc. is regularly published. Some state-run newspapers featuring the relevant column of a local executive committee have also placed "Election 2019" banners on their websites.

During the week, the chair of the Central Election Commission spoke twice on issues related to the principles of the current election.

On August 12, Lidziya Yarmoshyna commented on the criticism of early voting. In her estimation, the early voting procedure in Belarus is convenient for voters and makes it possible to attract a maximum number thereof, so the CEC is not going to abandon the practice.

The experts of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" note² that the improvement of early voting procedure in the Belarusian electoral legislation and practice is one of the vital conditions for the democratization of the election. Thus, art. 53 of the Electoral Code provides that early voting is meant for the citizens of Belarus who, on the election day, are missing at the place of residence and, therefore, are unable to come to the polling station where they are subject to vote. Herewith, no official confirmation of the absence reasons is required. In practice, this provision of the Electoral Code is not followed and leads to the fact that during the election campaign in Belarus there are actually six key voting days. During this time, local authorities use the administrative resource and force voters to come to the polls and vote early on a massive scale. Such manipulations allow for false reporting of the number of votes. Similar facts were repeatedly recorded by observers in the last election, which causes a significant distrust of the current early voting procedure. That is why Belarusian and international OSCE observers, above all, insist on the adjustment of this procedure.

At a press conference on August 14³, Lidziya Yarmoshyna described the socio-political conditions of the current election campaign as favorable and stable, noting that the hallmark of the elections in Belarus has always been their "social character." According to Lidziya Yarmoshyna, today the candidates have a great opportunity for a free election campaign (addresses in the state media, participation in TV-debates, etc.). The chair of the Central Election Commission announced an enhanced - compared to that of the previous election campaigns - use of information technologies and development of an inclusive approach.

² See: <https://elections2019.spring96.org/be/news/93688>.

³ See BelTA: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/izbiratel'naja-kampanija-v-belarusi-prohodit-v-politicheski-stabilnyh-uslovijah-ermoshina-358330-2019/>.

In particular, the CEC Resolution No. 29⁴ makes some positive changes that should help people with disabilities exercise their right to vote.

According to the director of the Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities Siarhei Drazdouski⁵, the introduction of "additional conditions" for people with disabilities at polling stations is a positive state practice. However, this practice is aimed only at improving the physical accessibility of polling stations for people with disabilities and does not cover such important elements of the electoral process as the exercise of their right to be elected or to participate in the work of an electoral commission. Siarhei Drazdouski points out the fact that, under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities signed by Belarus, people with disabilities should participate in decision-making.

COVERT ELECTION CAMPAIGNING

Prospective candidates and political parties do not show significant pre-election activity. However, the actions of individual activists in the provinces contain elements of covert election campaigning.

Thus, on August 13, a video of the civil project "Varta" was posted on YouTube announcing the election program of three prospective candidates⁶. According to the observers, one of the people featured in the clip is going to stand as a candidate in one of the electoral districts in Homiel.

Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada in Brest has also begun the campaign to find supporters and election campaign team members. Activists produced several videos that have been posted in social networks under the slogan "The Campaign FOR!"⁷.

On August 12, 13 and 15, video clips appeared on the YouTube channel of the BSDP Hramada, in which⁸ a potential candidate Valiantsin Trotski shared his thoughts on social issues (the construction of the Astraviec nuclear power plant, etc.).

⁴ The Resolution No. 29 of August 6, 2019 "On the creation of additional conditions for the participation of citizens with disabilities in the elections of deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the seventh convocation."

⁵ See: <http://spring96.org/ru/news/93694>.

⁶ See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_cwsL4rSM0

⁷ See: [https://www.facebook.com/ihar.maslouski.9/videos/2683776788301908/?t=7](https://www.facebook.com/ihar.maslouski.9/videos/2683776788301908/?t=7;);
[https://www.facebook.com/ihar.maslouski.9/videos/2683776788301908/?t=4](https://www.facebook.com/ihar.maslouski.9/videos/2683776788301908/?t=4;);
<https://www.facebook.com/belsocdemparty/videos/2165060280459850/?t=55>

⁸ See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFcJJ3W_S-s.