



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*

Report on the Registration of Nomination Groups

CONCLUSIONS

- the process of registration of nomination groups (initiative groups) of candidates for the House of Representatives was more democratic than that during the previous election campaign.
- the vast majority of groups for the nomination of opposition candidates were registered by the election authorities. Registration was denied to 30 groups, which is less than the number of denials in the parliamentary elections of 2012, but exceeds the amount of denials in 2008.
- there were reported cases of creating hindrance to activities by the members of opposition candidates' nomination groups.

I. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

According to Article 65 of the Electoral Code, one of the possible ways of nominating a candidate for Parliament is the collection of signatures, which is carried out by the nomination group of at least 10 people. For the registration of the nomination group, the nominated person shall submit not later than 65 days before Election Day to the corresponding district election commission a written application for registration of the nomination group, copies of passport pages proving Belarusian citizenship and registration on the territory of the Republic of Belarus, as well as the list of members of the nomination group.

The district election commission shall consider the application within five days from the date of its receipt, register the nomination group and issue its members certificates and signature sheets for the collection of signatures in support of the person proposed for nomination as a candidate for Parliament. Registration can be denied in case of violation of the requirements of the Electoral Code.

The district election commission's decision to refuse registration of the nomination group may be appealed by the nominated person to the territorial election commission within three days from the date of its adoption. The territorial election commission's decision may be appealed to the Regional (Minsk City) Court within three days after its adoption. The court shall consider the complaint within three days, its decision is final.

II. REGISTRATION OF NOMINATION GROUPS

In the first days of work by the election commissions, observers of the campaign *Human Rights Defenders For Free Elections* documented individual cases of absence of the commissioners at their workplace during working hours, which prevented several candidates from submitting their applications. On June 29, Tatsiana Malashchanka, a contender in Baranavičy, was not initially able to submit her application to district election commission No. 5.

A similar situation occurred on June 30 in the Škloŭ-based district election commission No. 90. Piotr Shymbaliou, an activist of *Tell the Truth* from Bialyničy, managed to apply only after a long search for the commission members in the offices of the local executive committee. The commission chairman Aliaksandr Hurynau said that the problem was due to certain difficulties typical of the first days of work, despite the fact that the first meeting of the DEC was held the day before. Similarly, the documents were submitted in the Sluck DEC No. 67 by Alina Nahornaya: the commission members arrived to receive the documents only after the contender's phone call to the CEC.

There is evidence of pressure exerted on members of some nomination groups. Maryna Khomich, a contender of the BCD party in the Minsk-based constituency No. 104 (chaired by Zinaida Zhaholkina), said that an unnamed representative of the commission phoned each of the 39 members of her nomination group and questioned the seriousness of their intent to participate in the collection of signatures.

Supporters of contender Leanid Dubanosau faced intimidation in the town of Luniniec, Brest region: two young people were urgently summoned to the military enlistment office, a woman was threatened with deprivation of parental rights, eventually forcing her to leave the nomination group.

Yury Liashenka, an opposition activist in Svietlahorsk, said that after the registration of his nomination group he received a claim for eviction from the house for temporary accommodation. He regards it as the pressure in connection with his involvement in the elections.

District election commission No. 105 (chaired by Mikalai Bury) refused to register the nomination group of a UCP member Mikalai Kazlou after certain errors were found in the list of the nomination group. Mikalai Kazlou appealed the decision to the Minsk city election commission. As a result, the commission ruled to cancel the initial ruling of the DEC and authorized the registration of his initiative group, excluding from the group several members with "incorrect data".

The same DEC refused to register the nomination group of former presidential candidate Mikalai Statkevich. The formal reason for the denial was the contender's unexpunged conviction. The commission's decision refers to Part 7, Art. 60 of the Electoral Code, which prohibits this type of persons to run in the elections. At the same time, the EU demanded the rehabilitation of former political prisoners after their release, including the restoration of their right to run in the elections.

According to the CEC, a total of 479 applications were submitted to the district election commissions, 3 applications were withdrawn.

Year	Number of nominations	Number of denials	Number of registered groups	Percentage of denials
2008	455	23	423	5%
2012	440	85	354	19.3 %
2016	479	30	446	6.2%

446 nomination groups were registered, 30 groups were denied registration, which is 6.2 % of the total number. The largest number of denials was reported in Minsk: 25 groups out of 139 applications, or 18%. Thus, the number of denials of registration corresponds to the figures documented during earlier elections. The high percentage of denials of registration during the 2012 parliamentary elections is due to the fact that the nomination groups of Mikalai Statkevich and Ales Mikhalevich applied for registration to several DEC's at a time, which is prohibited by the law.

Of the total number of persons whose nomination groups were registered, there are 160 (33%) party members. The largest number of registered nomination groups belongs to representatives of the United

Civil Party: 39 (24% of the total number of party members nominated by collecting signatures), with the Belarusian Left Party *Fair World* having 23 registered groups (14%), the BPF Party 29 (18%) — registered nomination groups and of the Belarusian Social Democratic party *Hramada* — 16 (10%).

III. COLLECTION OF SIGNATURES

The registered nomination groups have already started collecting signatures for the nomination of candidates for the House of Representatives. No major abuses have yet been reported, except a few minor incidents.

As during previous election campaigns, there are obstacles to collecting signatures in dormitories. On July 6, employees of the Belarusian Medical University's dormitory in Dziarzhynski Avenue in Minsk prohibited contender Pavel Stefanovich and a member of his nomination group Dzmitry Kavalhin to collect signatures on the premises. Police officers offered Stefanovich and Kavalhin to come to the police station to clarify the circumstances. After an interview that lasted for about three hours, they were released. These actions by police officers were appealed to the Minsk city executive committee's police department, the Prosecutor's Office of Minsk's Maskoŭski district and the district election commission.