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On the eve of the election to the Chamber of Representatives, the concerned Belarusians wondered if at least a couple of opposition activists would get to the Lower Chamber of Belarusian “parliament”. There appeared gossips in the press that there had been reached a corresponding agreement between the Belarusian and the EU top governmental officials. Some analysts were talking about “a list of five” and others noted “a list of 22”.

The official election results horrified all independent observers. No

opposition activists from out of 70 candidates, nominated by the United Democratic Forces, were elected to the Chamber of Representatives.

Thus, it appeared that the state authorities hadn’t dared share at least a drop of their power in the country. All 110 elected MPs are pro-governmental. Even a couple of personalities from the list of the so-called “constructive” (i.e., imitating) opposition, which used to be MPs before, failed to win the election (i.e., to be selected by the top authorities to represent

their interests in the “parliament”) this time. At once, numerous journalists considered the new “parliament” to be “sterile”.

According to one version, the Belarusian governmental officials received a promise from the Kremlin on the eve of the Election Day to have cheap gas and a discounted credit line they couldn’t decline. However, other experts believe that everything was much more unsophisticated this time, as in their opinion Alaksandar Lukashenka wasn’t psychologically ready to accept political liberalization in Belarus.

An independent political scientist Valer Karbalevich believes that the official Head of State simply “got scared of jeopardizing his personal powers by means of playing a game of democracy, as the experience of color revolutions shows that an important pre-condition of success of democratic forces is the presence of some democratic mechanisms in the country and the presence of opposition in the state institutions”. The analytic concludes that the authorities made up their minds “to deprive the opposition of becoming a system



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force in the country, to strip it of the legal base [for holding their activity – Belarus Live] and to keep it in the marginalized state even at the cost of the country's international interests.”

Independent analysts have noted that it was for the first time in modern history of Belarus that Parliamentary election attracted so little interest on the part of the Belarusian society and the country's political elite.

The level of competition at the recent Parliamentary election was a little bit more than 2 people for one MP mandate. It is the lowest figure starting from 1990. No alternative candidates were present at 15 constituencies in the country.

Also, the election showed a dubious record of early vote that amounted to 26.3%. (According to the official data, 75.3% of eligible voters came to cast their votes at the election.)

The democratic opposition leaders believe that the unnaturally high percent of early voters was generally ensured by the administrative compulsion. Consequently, the state authorities had a possibility to substitute the ballots at night, when the observers couldn't see the ballot-boxes.

At the same time, taking into account the mass presence of foreign observers, the authorities shut their eyes to a modest “outburst of street democracy” in the city center of Minsk on



September 28, 2008. As predicted by numerous experts, the protest action gathered quite a small number of activists. According to different estimates, around 1,000 people took part in the event.

The oppositional youth was trying to create some dynamic at the protest action. Consequently, a column of democratic activists marched along the main avenue to the Governmental premises in Independence Square. However, the action didn't last long. The democratic opposition leaders had admitted before the action that they didn't see any clear plan for the protest event. And the protest demand to the state authorities to arrange and hold new and fair election poised in mid-air. Average citizens were traditionally

apathetic, understanding pretty well that the election had been absolutely meaningless.

The protest action wasn't broken up. A. Lukashenka admitted later that he had given an order to the riot police to leave the protestors alone. However, as soon as the majority of foreign journalists and observers left the country, the authorities started putting pressure on the political parties, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that the materials about the protest action would be sent to the Public Prosecutor's Office. It should be mentioned that new political prisoners used to appear in Belarus exactly after street protest actions.

Generally, political scientists note that the democratic opposition participated in the Parliamentary election

campaign blankly, weakly and without enthusiasm.

Certainly, it would be odd to expect that the opposition would win the election in the present highly unfair conditions. Still, both activists and voters had the right to learn a well-digestible strategy to be delivered by the opposition leaders.

Meanwhile, the United Democratic Forces and separate political parties were separated by a discussion whether to take part in the election or whether to boycott it during the election campaign. On the eve of the Election Day, the management of democratic political parties decided “to slacken the reins”, stating that the candidates should make up their minds themselves whether to take part in the election till the end or whether to withdraw their candidatures.

The mission of OSCE observers presented their preliminary conclusion regarding the election in Minsk on September 29, 2008. Among other, it was noted that despite “some improvements”, the election didn't go in line with the OSCE standards in the field. The Head of OSCE short-term observers Ann-Marie Lisen stated that there were no significant problems during the voting process. However, she mentioned that the process “deteriorated considerably during the counting of votes”. In particular, the

preliminary conclusion was as follows: the vote counting procedure was held “badly” or “very badly” in 48% of registered cases. Moreover, it was noted that a number of cases of fraud were seen at the polling stations, where it was impossible to observe the voting and/or vote counting procedures. The OSCE observers were deprived of any opportunity to observe the vote counting process in 35% of registered cases.

The experts were expecting that the Belarusian governmental officials would respond highly critically to the OSCE conclusions and that the state media would commence a propagandist campaign on blaming the West for its “double standards”, as Alaksandar Lukashenka had warned the observers that should the West didn’t acknowledge the election results, the Belarusian government would terminate any talks with the European governments.

However, the Head of State had a face-to-face meeting with Ms. Ann-Marie Lisen after the election on September 30, 2008. The state-owned media reported upon the event almost in an idyllic manner. Thus, the monopoly on information allows creating such miracles in the field of public relations. A common Belarusian citizen will hardly search for the original report. Consequently, the OSCE

conclusions may be treated by common voters as complimentary.

It remains to be unclear if the West is ready to reject its principles in order to start a pragmatic dialogue with the dictator. Independent analytics emphasize that presently it is highly important for the United States and the European Union to wring Belarus out of the Russian influence.

At the same time, there appeared a restrained response to the election results from the Western capitals. Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy has chosen a reconciliatory tonality in her speech as well. “It is important for the EU to think now, how to develop better relations with Belarus, its government and its people”, she noted.

Briefly speaking, it looks as if the Belarusian and the EU top governmental officials have decided to pay little attention to the OSCE mission’s unpleasant conclusions. Independent experts believe that the Belarusian government is sustaining a pause and the European Union is thinking over how “to save its face”, as there had been declared a lot of pathetic statements about “positive signals” from Minsk before the election.

The Belarusian government hopes that the West will swallow a bitter pill in the form of the “sterile” Chamber

of Representatives, the analysts believe. By now the hopes have been practically justified. At the same time, independent experts warn the EU and the US governments against their idea of holding gradual “rearing” activities with Lukashenka’s regime, as the efforts may be frustrated at any moment. Still, who would propose a miraculous recipe for solving the problem?

Meanwhile, the Russian Prime-Minister Uladzimir Putin is coming to Minsk on October 6, 2008. It is expected that the Kremlin will put pressure on the regime in power in order to reach its objectives. Its trump cards include the price for natural



gas in the years to come as well as the opportunity of giving a credit to the Belarusian government for a sum of two billion USD.

POLITICS

The CE Top Official Highly Criticizes the Parliamentary Election in Belarus



Secretary General of the Council of Europe Terry Davis called the election of September 28 a lost chance for Belarus, Charter’97 reports.

Lukashenka never loses opportunity to lose opportunity. It was a hope that the recent “election” would be a turning point in the voluntary isolation of Belarus from the rest of Europe. Unfortunately, it didn’t happen, Mr Davis said about the “election”.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was unable to observe the voting, but the OSCE observers concluded that the elections fell short of European standards, Charter’97 reports.

The CE Secretary General Terry Davis said that as a friend of Belarusian people, he was deeply disappointed but still hoped the Belarusians would soon be able to take part in really free and fair voting.

OFFICIALLY

The "Chamber" Got Formed

According to the official results, no opposition representatives have entered the Chamber of Representatives.

110 deputy mandates in the lower chamber of Belarusian parliament have been passed to the state authority representatives. The Central Election Committee of Belarus confirmed that the United Democratic Forces would not have their representatives in the Chamber of Representatives. 78 democrats took part in the election campaign.

The Central Election Committee stated that 75.3% of eligible voters had come to cast their ballots.

OSCE Refuses to Recognize Election in Belarus

The OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission didn't recognise the "parliamentary elections" in Belarus democratic and free.

The OSCE observers noticed the process of counting votes was "poor or very poor" in 50 per cent of cases.

40 per cent of observers said they had had difficulties with access to vote counting.

The elections ultimately didn't meet the OSCE standards.

OPPOSITION

Witnesses Tell about Cases of Fraud at the Parliamentary Election

More than 130 complaints about cases of fraud at the recent Parliamentary election have been received by the Belarus' Public Prosecutor's Office. All of them were submitted by the Belarusian opposition activists.

Anatol Bukas from Barysau asserts that he saw how the polling workers were throwing ballots with crossed out surnames of opposition

candidates to the ballot boxes. Others insist that the ballot boxes were placed very far from the observers. Some people saw distinct traces of broken seals on the ballot boxes. An observer Andrei Klikunou from Minsk was given an invalid ballot without any signatures of the local electoral committee members, when he came to a polling station in Uruchcha micro-district in Minsk to vote. When he addressed to the polling worker with a request to give him a valid ballot with signatures, it appeared that the local electoral committee member had nothing but unsigned invalid ballots on his table.

Sviatlana Viarheychyk from the United Civil Party of Belarus was working as an observer at a polling station in Minsk starting from the first day of early vote on September 23, 2008. She was present at the polling station during the whole period of its work and noted 658 voters there during the whole voting period. Surprisingly, the local electoral committee stated in the final protocol that 1,163 people cast their votes at the polling station.

The Belarusian opposition leaders believe that not only the election results were fabricated. They noted that the attendance figures were overstated by the state officials as well. Thus, the Central Election Committee declared that 75% of eligible voters had come

to polling stations. At the same time, referring to the independent observers' updates, the opposition members insist that the number of eligible voters didn't exceed 50%.

ECONOMY

Some Belarusian Foodstuff Banned in Russia

It has been forbidden to import the foodstuff, produced by numerous Belarusian enterprises, to Russia since October 1, 2008.



The Russian foodstuff controlling authorities addressed to the Belarusian side with a request to present a list of foodstuff industrial enterprises that fulfilled the Russian veterinary and sanitary norms and demands.

SOCIETY

Who Voted?

According to a TUT.BY on-line survey results, the majority of Belarusian didn't take part in the recent Parliamentary "election".



More than 11,000 Internet users took part in the survey. 62.9% of them noted that they hadn't cast their votes at the Parliamentary election. At the same time, only 30% of respondents noted that they had voted during the election.

The Belarusian public learned about a new case of abuse of power during the election day, when a healthy family of farmers from the village of Yankavichy, Staubcy district, was visited by local polling officials, who obliged them to vote for a pro-regime candidate.

It is hard to believe that the case was unique.

CULTURE

Actors from Yanka Kupala National Drama Theatre Invited for a Talk to the President's Office

The Chief ideologist at the President's Office Usievalad Yancheuski invited three leading actors of Yanka Kupala National Drama Theatre Aliaksandr Malchanau, Sviatlana Zielankouskaya and Hanna Khitryk for a talk on October 2, 2008 www.charter97.org reports.



The invitation was reasoned by a conflict between the theatre administration and the theatre group. The theatre actor Alena Ivannikava had written a letter to the President's Office beforehand with complains about the poor repertoire, dismissals of leading actors and scanty earnings at Yanka Kupala National Drama Theatre.



CENTRUM STOSUNKÓW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
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EUROPEAN RADIO FOR BELARUS



There are various sites devoted to events in Belarus, which are, however, little known in Western Europe, and among people dealing with politics towards Belarus who do not understand the Russian or Belarusian languages.

The site [belarus-live](http://belarus-live.eu) fills this gap. The site allows to order weekly reception of news in English, Polish, Belarusian, Russian.