

POLITICALLY BIASED ELECTION OBSERVATION –

a threat to the
integrity of
international
institutions



**POLITICALLY
BIASED ELECTION
OBSERVATION –**
a threat to the
integrity of
international
institutions



Imprint

Edition:

European Platform for Democratic Elections
www.epde.org

Responsible for the content:

Europaischer Austausch gGmbH
Erkelenzdam 59
10999 Berlin, Germany

Represented through:

Stefanie Schiffer

EPDE is financially supported by the European Union



and the Federal Foreign Office of Germany.



Auswärtiges Amt



The here expressed opinion does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the donors.

Content

Introduction	4
Detection and Prevention of politically Biased election observation (“fake observation”) in the OSCE region	7
Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate Presidential Election in Crimea in March 2018	13
Politically biased foreign electoral observation at the Russian 2018 presidential election	33
Politically Biased International Election Observation at the 2018 Regional Elections in Russia	63
The Globalisation of Pro-Kremlin Networks of Politically Biased Election Observation: The Cases of Cambodia and Zimbabwe	75
Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate “General Elections” in the Donetsk People’s Republic and Lugansk People’s Republic in November 2018	101

Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed the increasing phenomenon of “biased observation”—a form of more politically-motivated election observation whose chief objective is to mislead the public regarding the regularity of some political process or the legitimacy of an election result. Striking examples were the “referendum” on Crimea in March 2014, the “elections” in Eastern Ukraine in November 2014, the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan since 2013, and the Presidential elections in the Russian Federation in March 2018.

By participating on an individual basis in election observation activities that do not respect the basic, internationally agreed-upon principles and methodology of election monitoring, parliamentarians can damage—intentionally or unwittingly—the reputation of the institutions they represent. The integrity of the parliamentary body can come under suspicion not only in the host country, but also in the region, within the EU, and abroad. In cases when such individual and unauthorised “observations” nevertheless do take place, those parliamentarians who “observed” the elections on their own initiative must ensure that their personal opinion is not confused with or intentionally presented by the media as the official position of the institution.

EPDE has been following the phenomenon of politically biased election observation since 2014, when Anar Mammadli, Director of the Azerbaijani EPDE member organisation “Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre”, was sentenced to 5,5 years of prison time after critically reporting on the fraudulent Azerbaijani Presidential elections in 2013. At the same time, these elections were whitewashed by international “election observers”—among them members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Since that time, election experts and civil society networks have done a lot to increase transparency in the field of international election observation. In 2017, the Council of Europe initiated an internal investigation on political corruption in member countries where election observation missions have played a key role.

International institutions, election observers, and election experts still face a series of challenges in protecting well-established mechanisms of election observation against misuse and political corruption. There are still open questions:

- How have election observation missions in the past served as an entry to international corruption networks? What are the personal and international links between politically motivated election observation and lobby activities for authoritarian states in the OSCE region?
- How can international organisations improve their institutional framework in order to safeguard themselves from politically biased election observation?
- How can international and local election observers together take action against intentional delegitimation of electoral processes?

By publicizing the findings of its research on politically biased election observation, EPDE contributes to the protection of elections against biased outcomes. This brochure includes two reports by Anton Shekhovtsov on biased observation of the March 2018 Presidential elections in the Russian Federation and the annexed Crimea. Additionally, we are pleased to be able to publish here the recommendations that EPDE experts gathered in March 2017 during a Round Table on biased election observation in the European Parliament.



Detection and Prevention of politically Biased election observation (“fake observation”) in the OSCE region

EPDE Board

Berlin, Germany, 7 March, 2017

Background

In the last years we observe that an increasing number of countries in the OSCE region assess election observation no longer as an instrument to improve electoral processes but as a threat to the intentional and systematic manipulation of elections in their countries. At the same time these regimes increasingly misuse the instrument of international election observation to give legitimacy to fraudulent elections through the assignment of biased election reports. These developments destroy the trust in elections and shatter the legitimacy of all institutions involved in these processes.

In 2015 EPDE has started to systematically study the quality of international election observation missions. In-depth research of international election observation missions into the following elections has been done during the:

- Parliamentary elections Azerbaijan, 1.11.2015
- Constitutional Referendum Armenia, 6.12.2015
- Parliamentary elections in the Russian Federation, 18.9.2016
- Constitutional Referendum in Azerbaijan, 26.9.2016

All reports are accessible on www.epde.org

EDPE hereby refers to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and **Code of Conduct for International Election Observation**¹ along with the OSCE and Council of Europe standards of free and fair elections. With respect to that, EPDE promotes the article 6 of the aforementioned Declaration as a fundamental norm for international election observation missions:

“International election observation is conducted for the benefit of the people of the country holding the elections and for the benefit of the international community. It is process oriented, not concerned with any particular electoral result, and is concerned with results only to the degree that they are reported honestly and accurately in a transparent and timely manner. No one should be allowed to be a member of an international election observer mission unless that person is free from any political, economic or other conflicts of interest that would interfere with conducting observations accurately and impartially and/or drawing conclusions about the character of the election process accurately and impartially...”

Findings

EPDE observes a growing tendency among authoritarian regimes in the OSCE region to **orchestrate benevolent election observation** in order to give legitimacy to fraudulent elections. For this purpose, some regimes use EOM of national and international GONGOs and invite members of European parliaments or international parliamentary bodies as PA OSCE, PACE, EP and others to voice out biased election assessments.

EPDE observes a series of cases where **European parliamentarians individually make public assessments** of elections abroad, giving an impression to represent the position of their parliament also while their activity is not endorsed by their parliament or their faction, and when they are not member of any official EOM. By that, they discredit not only the parliament and the faction they represent but election observation as such.

Currently, there are European parliaments which did not sufficiently elaborate **effective internal control mechanisms** (i.e. Codes of Conduct) to discourage their members from participating in biased international election observation missions. Generally, the countermeasures to prevent parliamentarians from giving public individual assessments differing from the findings and conclusions of the election observation mission they are members of are neither sufficient, not efficient.

1 https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/1923_declaration_102705_0.pdf

Also, an **increasing number of GONGOs** (governmental organized NGOs) publish assessments on election processes which are not based on any methodological election observation, while often being purely politically motivated.

EPDE observes a tendency that election administrations in some countries of the OSCE region deliberately **deny accreditation to independent international EOM²** adhering to international standards as the ODIHR methodology or the DoP.

Unlike OSCE/ODIHR, which has a well-established methodology as a professional international election observation institution, IEOM from CIS, PACE, OSCE PA and the European Parliament do not operate on the basis of a transparent and clearly defined **election observation methodology** for the assessment of the election process.

So far, there are no **established mechanisms to monitor the conduct of parliamentarians participating** in observation missions of PACE, PA OSCE or the EP, or procedures to establish on which basis conclusions which significantly differ from the conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR LTO mission have been made.

EPDE also observes an increasing tendency to deploy election observation missions to **internationally unrecognized territories of armed conflicts** (Abkhaziya, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Crimea, Lugansk and Donetsk). By participating in such missions European parliamentarians contribute to legitimating the non-recognized regimes and undermine international law and principles of international election observation.

Recommendations

National and regional European parliaments as well as international parliamentary bodies should **update their Codes of Conduct** for parliamentarians, hereby including special provisions for the participation in international election observation missions.

International parliamentary bodies as PACE, PA OSCE, PABSEC and others should establish "focal points on elections" – **independent commissions on ethics of election observation** that monitor the conduct of parliamentarians during international missions and their compliance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the parliaments' Codes of Conduct.

2 EPDE was denied accreditation to the Parliamentary elections 2016 in the Russian Federation, to the Referendum 2015 in Armenia and to the Parliamentary elections 2017 in Armenia.

Without the support from a long-term election observation mission, i.e. one organized by the OSCE/ODIHR, international parliamentary bodies as PACE, PA OSCE, EP, PABSEC and others should **refrain from observing and commenting the voting procedures solely on election day**. Such short visits would not allow the systematic, comprehensive and accurate gathering of information the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation encompasses.

The signatories of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation should assess **the exclusion of a signatory** in case the organization does not adhere to the principles.

International election experts in intergovernmental institutions, together with international civil society organizations, should make efforts to **raise the awareness among parliaments and political parties** of the EU member states that participation of parliamentarians in election observation missions with unknown methodology, goals and financial sources, harms the credibility and reputation of their institution and of international election observation.

Increased activity of independent scholars, mass media projects and civil society organizations working on the detection of election fraud should be encouraged, and **international exchange of strategies and methods should be developed**.

A better link and permanent coordination between the work of the OSCE/ODIHR long term observation and the political short term observation from EP, PACE, PA OSCE should be established. Findings and conclusions should be drawn only based on methodologically proper findings.

European structures together with international civil society organizations **shall raise the awareness among parliaments and political parties of the EU member states** that the observation of elections on unrecognized territories with armed conflict (Abkhaziya, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Crimea, Lugansk and Donetsk) by their parliamentarians damages the reputation of their institutions as well as of international election observation as such.

Political Party Factions should be made aware about the phenomenon of biased election observation and develop tools to **inform and eventually sanction their members** when participating in them.

This policy brief was prepared by the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) to evaluate the increasing impact of politically biased election observation and to contribute to the identification of countermeasures. The Paper was developed

ahead of the experts' Round table "Improving the Accountability of Parliamentarians in Election Observation" hosted by the European Parliament's Democracy and Election Group (DEG) and the EPDE on March 7th 2017 in the European Parliament in Brussels.



Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate Presidential Election in Crimea in March 2018

Report by **Anton Shekhovtsov**

Introduction

In December 2017, the Russian media reported that neither the OSCE ODIHR nor the EU would send any electoral monitors to Russia-annexed Crimea to observe the Russian presidential election on the 18th of March 2018.¹ This report came as no surprise: these institutions do not recognise the Russian status of Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea annexed in March 2014, therefore, they consider any Russia-controlled electoral process in Crimea as illegitimate, while sending electoral observers there would provide legitimacy to the annexation.

The Russian authorities were obviously not surprised by the statements of the OSCE ODIHR and EU either. Citing Russian diplomatic sources, the media reported that “dozens of international experts, including members of national parliaments of EU Member States” would monitor the presidential election in Crimea.² The same sources mentioned several EU Member States: Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France and Italy. According to Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky, “the group of experts would feature parliamentarians who advocate the legitimacy of Crimea’s reunification with Russia [...]. Their presence on the peninsula would suffice, and

1 Dmitry Laru, Angelina Galanina, “Krym ne ostavyat bez nablyudeniya”, *Izvestiya*, 25 December (2017), <https://iz.ru/686918/dmitrii-laru-angelina-galanina/krym-ne-ostavyat-bez-nablyudeniia>.

2 Ibid.



Foreign observers and co-organisers of their monitoring mission meeting with representatives of the Russian occupying authorities in Sevastopol. Left to right: Yuriy Navoyan, Diego Guillen Perez, Alexander Kobrinskiy, Alexander Petukhov, Olga Timofeeva, Marco Marsili, Alexander Grönlund, Maria Olshanskaya, Ulf Grönlund, Kristofer Wähländer, Mger Simonyan, Diana Lutsker, Alexander Kulagin.

their voice would be heard in the international community”.³ Another source from the Russian authorities said that “around ten parliamentarians” would observe the election in Crimea.⁴

At the same time, the Ukrainian authorities warned that any participation in the electoral process in Crimea would be illegal. On the 15th of December 2017, Ukraine’s deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Vasyl Bodnar stated that “the observers, social activists or politicians, who would visit the occupied Crimea for monitoring the [presidential] election, would be considered as persons who would later be banned from entering Ukraine and put under relevant international sanctions”.⁵

3 Ibid.

4 Dmitry Laru, Angelina Galanina, Tatyana Baykova, “Bolee 150 inostrannykh deputatov posetyat prezidentskie vybory v Rossii”, *Izvestiya*, 22 January (2018), <https://iz.ru/697617/dmitrii-laru-angelina-galanina-tatiana-baikova/bolee-150-inostrannykh-deputatov-posetiat-prezidentskie-vybory-v-rossii>.

5 “U MZS Ukrayiny zavvlyayut’ pro nezakonnist’ bud’-yakoyi uchasti u vyborchomu protsesi v okupovanomu Krymu”, *Interfax*, 15 December (2017), <http://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/political/470168.html>.



Cypriot observers
Sofoklis Yanni
Sofokli (left) and
Skevi Koukouma

The warning from the Ukrainian authorities did not persuade several foreign actors from declaring that they would observe the presidential election in Crimea. On the same day when the Ukrainian authorities made their statement, Andreas Maurer, the leader of the parliamentary group of the German Left party (Die Linke) in the Osnabrück region, claimed that “there would be a delegation from Germany at the presidential election in Crimea, and I would be part of it. [...] I am sure that politicians and public figures from France, Italy and other European states would go to Crimea too [...]”.⁶ A few days later, an Italian journalist and former far-left politician Giulietto Chiesa said that he would definitely go to Crimea to observe the election if he could.⁷ In February 2018, Serge Phocas Odunlami, a dual Beninese/Russian citizen and president of the Moscow-based NGO “House of Africa”, stated that he had proposed his organisation as a participant of the monitoring mission in Crimea and that he would try to involve other NGOs from Africa in the observation process.⁸ The three cited actors had already visited Crimea illegally before, yet, despite their statements, there is no evidence that either Odunlami or Chiesa observed the presidential election in Crimea, but Maurer indeed was part of the mission, although his claim that he would bring “a German delegation” was – as the research suggests – grossly exaggerated.

6 “Nemetskiy politik otvetil Kievu: nablyudateli iz Germanii priydu v Krym”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 15 December (2017), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20171215/1113171605.html>.

7 “Italianskiy zhurnalist: priydu na vybory v Krym, nesmotrya na ugrozy Kievu”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 22 December (2017), <http://crimea.ria.ru/radio/20171222/1113258788.html>.

8 “Nablyudateli iz Afriki khotyat priekhat’ na vybory prezidenta Rossii v Krym”, *RIA Novosti*, 16 February (2018), https://ria.ru/election2018_news/20180216/1514779225.html.

Russian coordinators of the observation mission

On the day of the election, Ella Pamfilova, Chairwoman of the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Russia, revealed that, in Crimea, there were 43 officially accredited foreign observers from 20 countries, who were formally invited by the Federation Council or the State Duma.⁹ Invitations from the Federation Council were signed by its Deputy Chairman Ilyas Umakhanov; those from the State Duma were signed by its Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin. However, both institutions were just the highest actors in the hierarchy of those organisations that coordinated individual observers who would monitor the illegitimate presidential election in Crimea. The full official list of those observers has not been made public so far.

The analysis of Russian media reports suggests that there were several Russian organisations that engaged with the foreign “Crimean observers”. These organisations include, but are most likely not limited to, the following: (1) Civic Control Association (CCA) headed by Alexander Brod, (2) Agency of Ethno-National Strategies (AENS) headed by Alexander Kobrinskiy, (3) Russian Peace Foundation (RPF) headed by Leonid Slutsky, (4) Foundation for the Development of Eurasian Cooperation (FDEC) headed by Mger Simonyan, and (5) Civic Organisation “Dialogue” headed by Yuriy Navoyan.

The CCA has already been involved in several attempts to provide legitimacy to internationally illegitimate electoral processes in Ukraine. For example, in March 2014, the CCA coordinated a large bulk of foreign observers of the “referendum” in Crimea that was followed by the formal annexation of this Ukrainian republic by Russia; while, in November 2014, the CCA provided foreign observers for the “parliamentary elections” in the Russia-occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine. For the 2018 presidential election in Crimea, the CCA cooperated with the Alexander Kobrinskiy, a member of the far-right, misleadingly named Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and a permanent expert of the CCA.

At the end of February 2018, Kobrinskiy, who represented the LDPR in the CEC in 2006-2008 and took part in several OSCE ODIHR electoral observation missions since 2013, sent out letters to several European organisations inviting them to observe the Russian presidential election in Crimea. As he confessed

9 “Pamfilova: mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli v Krymu byli priglasheny Gosdumoy i Sovfedom”, TASS, 18 March (2018), <http://tass.ru/politika/5041998>. The number was previously voiced here: “Khod vyborov v Krymu prokontrolirovuyut 43 inostrannykh nablyudatelya – Stepanov”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 16 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180316/1114035013.html>.



Foreign observers at a polling station. Left to right: Marija Janjušević, Stefano Valdegamberi, Roberto Ciambetti, Dragana Trifković, Slaviša Ristić.

that he was “really saddened and truly disappointed” that “ODIHR OSCE and some other international organizations” “would not observe the presidential elections in Crimea, Kobrinskiy said that his plan was to “to organize a group of independent international observers to monitor the elections” in Crimea. Kobrinskiy promised that they – he did not specify who exactly – would “provide visa support and cover travel expenses, accommodation, health insurance and daily living expenses in Russia”.

On the 16th of March, Kobrinskiy, as well as Yuriy Navoyan of the “Dialogue” and Mger Simonyan of the FDEC, turned up in Crimea leading a group of several foreign observers. The following people were present in this group: Mohamed Al-Hamali,¹⁰ Alexander Grönlund, Ulf Grönlund, Lars Peder Bjørndal Hollænder, Diana Lutsker, Marco Marsili, Tetyana Mele, Maria Olshanskaya, Diego Guillen Perez, Narcís Romà i Monfà and Kristofer Wähländer.¹¹ While the visit to Crimea of this particular group of foreign observers was jointly organised by the AENS, “Dialogue” and FDEC, at the moment it is impossible

10 This name was transliterated from Russian, so the current spelling may slightly differ from the original name in English.

11 This list of observers comprising this particular group may not be complete.

to determine what particular observers were invited either by Kobrinsky, or Navoyan, or Simonyan. However, it seems viable to suggest that Kobrinskiy had known Holländer and Marsili since at least 2017 when all three of them monitored the presidential election in the Kyrgyz Republic as members of the OSCE ODIHR electoral observation mission.¹²

On the 17th of March, the Simferopol airport saw a large group of foreign observers that included, but was not limited to, the following people: Carmen Luisa Bohórquez-Morán, Gilbert Doctorow, Éric Doligé, Aleksandrs Gaponenko, Marija Janjušević, Jérôme Lambert, Jacques Myard, Bernhard Ulrich Oehme, Patrick Poppel, Slaviša Ristić, Nishan Selvaraj, Dragana Trifković, Stefano Valdegamberi.

It is unclear whether these observers were coordinated by one Russian organisation or several, but the visit to Crimea of the three French monitors (Doligé, Lambert and Myard) was a result of the cooperation between the RPF and the France-based Association “French-Russian Dialogue” (Association Dialogue Franco-Russe, ADFR)¹³ presided by Thierry Mariani, a member of the French centre-right Republicans party and former MP.¹⁴ The RPF’s Slutsky, who was recently accused of sexual harassment by several Russian female journalists¹⁵ and is, like Kobrinskiy, a member of the far-right LPDR, has been in contact with the ADFR at least since 2006.¹⁶ Slutsky is a member of the ADFR,¹⁷ and his RPF funded Mariani’s trips to Moscow and Russia-annexed Crimea in 2015.¹⁸

12 OSCE, “Kyrgyzstan, Presidential Election, 15 October 2017: Final Report”, OSCE, 8 March (2018), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/374740>.

13 “Loiret: Eric Doligé observateur des élections en Russie”, *Magcentre*, 8 March (2018), <http://www.magcentre.fr/149487-loiret-eric-dolige-observateur-des-elections-en-russie/>.

14 On the 16th of March, the Russian media announced that Mariani would bring more than 20 French observers to Crimea to monitor the election: “Na vybory v Krym priedet delegatsiya nablyudateley iz Frantsii vo glave s Mariani”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 16 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180316/1114035257.html>. But that report was either a mistake or propaganda: only three above-mentioned French observers from Mariani’s delegation went to Crimea, while all the others, including Mariani himself, observed the election in Russia, rather than Crimea.

15 Anna Rivina, Olga Strakhovskaya, “Zhurnalistki obvinili Leonida Slutskogo v domogatel’stvakh”, *Meduza*, 28 February (2018), <https://meduza.io/feature/2018/02/28/zhurnalistki-obvinili-leonila-slutskogo-v-domogatelstvakh-oni-mogut-podat-v-sud-a-chto-s-deputatskoy-neprikosnovennostyu>.

16 “Prazdnovanie Dnya Vzyatiya Bastilii”, *Rossiyskiy Fond Mira*, 13 July (2006), <http://www.peacefond.ru/structure/chairman/?id=15>.

17 “Sloutski Léonid”, *Association Dialogue Franco-Russe*, <http://dialoguefrancorusse.com/fr/association/membres-partenaires/120-membres/690-sloutski-leonid.html>.

18 Polina Khimshiashvili, “Frantsuzskie deputaty vystupili v Moskve v podderzhku politiki Rossii”, *RBC*, 9 April (2015), <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/09/04/2015/5522668fa9a7947cca2177670>; “Glava frantsuzskoy parlamentskoy delegatsii rasskazal o tsenyakh vizita v Krym”, *TASS*, 22 July (2015), <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/2134645>.

Like the CCA, Slutsky was involved, in 2014, in providing observers for the “referendum” in Crimea and “parliamentary elections” in occupied East Ukrainian territories, but, unlike the CCA, Slutsky was bringing Russian, rather than foreign, observers at that time.

Another Russian organisation, which was, to a certain extent, involved in bringing a foreign actor to Crimea in relation to the presidential election, was the National Social Monitoring (NSM) headed by Alexander Zakuskin. Upon the invitation of the NSM, G. Kline Preston IV visited Sevastopol on the 13th of March in the role of “a foreign expert” in order to “evaluate the new voting system”.¹⁹ However, no media report stated that Preston was an electoral observer, while other evidence suggests that he was not present in Crimea on the day of the election, therefore, the NSM cannot be, at least at the moment, added to the list of the Russian organisations that engaged with the foreign “Crimean observers”.

Foreign observers and other actors in Crimea on the Election Day

So far, 35 out of 43 foreign official observers who were illegally present in Crimea on the Election Day have been identified, see Table 1.

Table 1. Identified foreign observers at the presidential election in Crimea

No.	Country	Name	Political affiliation	Russian coordinator
1	Afghanistan	Ikhlas Mohammad Tamim	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
2	Austria	Patrick Poppel	N/A	*Unknown
3	Cyprus	Elias Demetriou	Progressive Party for the Working People	*Unknown
4	Cyprus	Skevi Koukouma Koutra	Progressive Party for the Working People	*Unknown
5	Cyprus	Dimitrios Liatsos	N/A	*Unknown
6	Cyprus	Sofoklis Yanni Sofokli	Progressive Party for the Working People	*Unknown
7	Denmark	Lars Peder Bjørndal Hollænder	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
8	Finland	Johan Bäckman	N/A	*Unknown

19 “Sevizbirkom posetil ekspert iz SShA”, *Sevastopol'skaya gorodskaya izbiratel'naya komissiya*, 12 March (2018), <http://www.sevastopol.izbirkom.ru/news/sevizbirkom-posetil-ekspert-iz-ssha.html>.

No.	Country	Name	Political affiliation	Russian coordinator
9	France	Éric Doligé	The Republicans	RPF
10	France	Hubert Fayard	N/A	*Unknown
11	France	Jérôme Lambert	Socialist Party	RPF
12	France	Jacques Myard	The Republicans	RPF
13	Germany	Andreas Maurer	The Left	*Unknown
14	Germany	Bernhard Ulrich Oehme	Alternative for Germany	*Unknown
15	Israel	Diana Lutsker	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
16	Israel	Maria Olshanskaya	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
17	Italy	Marco Marsili	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
18	Italy	Roberto Ciambetti	Northern League	*Unknown
19	Italy	Stefano Valdegamberi	Northern League	*Unknown
20	Latvia	Aleksandrs Gaponenko	N/A	*Unknown
21	Malaysia	Nishan Selvaraj	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
22	Norway	Mette Rosenlund	N/A	*Unknown
23	Norway	Hendrik Weber	N/A	*Unknown
24	Serbia	Marija Janjušević	Serbian Movement Dveri	*Unknown
25	Serbia	Slaviša Ristić	Democratic Party of Serbia	*Unknown
26	Serbia	Dragana Trifković	N/A	*Unknown
27	Spain	Diego Guillen Perez	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
28	Spain	Narcís Romà i Monfà	Republican Left of Catalonia	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
29	Sweden	Alexander Grönlund	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
30	Sweden	Ulf Grönlund	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
31	Sweden	Kristofer Wählander	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
32	UK	Mohamed Al-Hamali	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
33	Ukraine	Tetyana Mele ²⁰	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
34	USA	Gilbert Doctorow	N/A	*Unknown

20 Tetyana Mele was presented as an observer from Ukraine, and even her name was spelt in the Ukrainian way, i.e. “Tetyana”, rather than in accordance with the Russian spelling, “Tatyana”. However, the analysis of her profiles on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100003082504317>) and VK (<https://vk.com/id246868156>) suggest that, while she was indeed born in Ukraine (namely in the city of Khmelnytskyy), she currently lives either in Russia (St. Petersburg) or Germany, and spells her name in the Russian way, i.e. “Tatyana”.

No.	Country	Name	Political affiliation	Russian coordinator
35	Venezuela	Carmen Luisa Bohórquez-Morán	United Socialist Party of Venezuela	*Unknown

Also present in Crimea on the Election Day were several foreign actors who were accredited as journalists and entered Crimea illegally. They did not act as observers, but they did accompany accredited foreign observers. The precise number of these journalists is currently unknown, but we have identified two of them, see Table 2.

Table 2. Identified foreign journalists at the presidential election in Crimea

No.	Country	Name	Media	Entourage of
1	Germany	Thomas Ludwig	Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung	Andreas Maurer
2	Germany	Manuel Ochsenreiter	<i>Zuerst!</i>	Bernhard Ulrich Oehme

Furthermore, Johan Bäckman, who was an accredited electoral observer, was reported to have led “a Finnish delegation” of 9 people (including Bäckman himself) who were presented as members of the Finland-based Russian-Finnish Friendship Association headed by Daria Skippari-Smirnov. The delegation illegally travelled to Crimea for the period 13-20 March 2018, and during this period was used by the Russian media for the propaganda purposes.²¹ So far, 5 members of the “Finnish delegation” have been identified, see Table 3.

Table 3. Identified members of the delegation from Finland in Crimea on 13-20 March 2018

No.	Name	Affiliation
1	Eero Hult	True Finns
2	Svetlana Mustonen	*Unknown
3	Ludmila Odintsova	*Unknown
4	Marjaliisa Siira	Finnish Peace Committee
5	Daria Skippari-Smirnov	Russian-Finnish Friendship Association

21 “Finskaya delegatsiya planiruet eshche dvazhdy v etom godu posetit’ Krym”, *Kryminform*, 16 March (2018), <http://www.c-inform.info/news/id/62869>; Ekaterina Seryugina, Aleksey Romanov, “Yokhan Bekman: ‘U finnov ogromnoe zhelanie voochiyu uvidet’ Krym””, *Pervy krymskiy*, 16 March (2018), <http://1tvcrimea.ru/pages/news/072048-johan-bekman-u-finnov-ogromnoe-zhelanie-voochiju-uvidet-krym>.

Finally, there was an international delegation of around 20 people, mostly students (the exact number is unknown), who were present in Crimea on the Election Day, see Table 4. This delegation was part of the international youth forum “Russia – a Country of Opportunities” that was organised by the Russian Presidential Administration and took place in Moscow on 13-16 March 2018. After the forum finished, some of the participants illegally travelled to Crimea on the 16th of March. Despite the misleading reports,²² they were not accredited as observers.²³ However, they visited polling stations and made election-related comments for the Russian media,²⁴ some of which falsely presented them as electoral monitors and, therefore, turned the participants of the forum into the instruments of the Kremlin’s propaganda.

Table 4. Identified participants of the Forum “Russia – a Country of Opportunities” at the presidential election in Crimea

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation/academic institution
1	Turkmenistan	Dovran Bashimov	*Unknown
2	France	Nicolas Charras	*Unknown
3	Columbia	Ivan Cruz	Saint Thomas Aquinas University
4	Vietnam	Qang Huỳnh Đức	Railway College
5	Serbia	Stefan Đurić	University of Kragujevac
6	Egypt	Mohammed Abd Ellateef	*Unknown
7	Pakistan	Absa Komal	Geo News Urdu
8	Pakistan	Muhammad Ibrahim Khan	U.S. Ambassador’s Youth Council – Pakistan
9	Kazakhstan	Yelena Khegay	*Unknown
10	Turkey	Güler Nesrin Kocaman	Dokuz Eylül University
11	Spain	Javi de Lara	University of Castilla-La Mancha
12	Germany	Artur Leier	*Unknown
13	Serbia	Djordje Petrovic	University of Kragujevac
14	Spain	Enrique Refoyo	*Unknown

- 22 Victor Ternovsky, “Observador español sobre presidenciales en Crimea: ‘La experiencia es acabar enfadado’”, *Sputnik*, 22 March (2018), https://mundo.sputniknews.com/radio_que_pasa/201803221077251101-elecciones-presidenciales-en-crimea/.
- 23 Were the delegation of around 20 participants of the forum “Russia – a Country of Opportunities” to be added to the number of the already identified foreign observers (35 people, see Table 1), then the total number of foreign observers would exceed their official number, i.e. 43 people. Moreover, while in Crimea, no member of this delegation wore a special card issued by the CEC identifying them as official observers.
- 24 “Uchastnikov foruma ‘Rossiya – strana vozmozhnostey’ udivilo chislo golosuyushchikh v Sevastopole”, *TASS*, 18 March (2018), <http://tass.ru/politika/5042791>; “Chto v Sevastopole dovelo studenta iz Vyetnama do slyoz”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 20 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/society/20180320/1114072832.html>.

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation/academic institution
15	Jordan	Mohammad J. Qardan	Oxford Brookes University
16	Ecuador	Sixto Zotaminga	Youth Network of Pichincha

Established involvement of “Crimean observers” in pro-Kremlin efforts

A number of foreign actors who observed the illegitimate presidential election in Crimea on the 18th of March 2018 have a record of previous involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts that can be defined, in the context of this report, as activities aimed at promoting the Kremlin’s foreign policy interests, in particular legitimising and justifying actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Patrick Poppel is the general secretary of the Austria-based pro-Kremlin Suvorov Institute that “pursues a nationalist, anti-liberal and anti-Western agenda”.²⁵ In 2016-2017, Poppel was a regular contributor to the Russian, fiercely anti-Western website *Katehon* established by the Russian ultranationalist businessman Konstantin Malofeev who sponsored the initial separatist activities in Ukraine in the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In 2016, Poppel demonstrated in Vienna holding a flag of the so-called Novorossiia (New Russia), a non-existent separatist state allegedly located within the internationally recognised borders of Ukraine. In January 2018, Poppel co-hosted a visit of Russian fascist Alexander Dugin to Vienna.²⁶

Johan Bäckman is a long-time pro-Kremlin political activist who, among the other observers of the presidential election in Crimea in 2018, was the only foreign actor who had observed the illegitimate referendum in Crimea in March 2014. In May 2014, Bäckman declared himself a representative of the separatist “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR) in Finland. He frequently travelled to the DNR and, in October 2016, observed the so-called primary regional elections there. For his blatant pro-Kremlin activities elsewhere, he was banned from entering Estonia and Moldova in 2009 and 2014 respectively, as well as being

25 Fabian Schmid, Markus Sulzbacher, “Sputnik, FPÖ, Identitäre: Russisch-rechtes Rendezvous in Wien”, *Der Standard*, 31 July (2016), <https://derstandard.at/2000042003825/Sputnik-Gudenus-Identitaere-Russisch-rechtes-Rendezvous-in-Wien>.

26 Gerhard Lechner, “Russland hat das getan, was Dugin zuvor gesagt hatte”, *Wiener Zeitung*, 26 January (2018), https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/europa/europastaaten/943553_Russland-hat-das-getan-was-Dugin-zuvor-gesagt-hatte.html.



Foreign observers Bernhard Ulrich Oehme (left) and Johan Bäckman (centre), with German far-right journalist Manuel Ochsenreiter (right)

charged, in March 2018, with harassment and aggravated defamation of a Finnish journalist who investigated the activities of the Russian “troll factory”.²⁷

Jérôme Lambert and Jacques Myard were part of Thierry Mariani’s delegation to Crimea in July 2015 upon the invitation from Leonid Slutsky. The Ukrainian authorities imposed a 3-year entry ban on Lambert and Myard for illegally crossing the internationally recognised Ukrainian border.²⁸

Soviet-born Andreas Maurer has illegally travelled to Crimea several times since June 2016 and, during his first visit, suggested that the Osnabrück parliament could recognise the “Russian status” of Crimea. Maurer is a regular commentator

27 “Controversial Academic Charged over Harassment, Slander of Yle Journalist”, *Yle*, 26 March (2018), https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/controversial_academic_charged_over_harassment_slander_of_yle_journalist/10134347.

28 “Posetivshim Krym frantsuzskim deputatam zpreshchen v’yezd v Ukrainu na 3 goda”, *Interfax*, 30 July (2015), <http://interfax.com.ua/news/general/281063.html>.



Foreign observers Andreas Maurer (left) and Hendrik Weber (right).

for the Russian state media, and – presenting himself as the leader of the “Public Diplomacy Germany” project – he also travelled to the DNR in February 2018 to discuss “further cooperation opportunities [and] business partnership”.²⁹

Marital partners Mette Rosenlund and Hendrik Weber illegally travelled to Crimea for the first time in October 2017 as representatives of the “Public Diplomacy Norway”.³⁰ Together with Maurer, Weber travelled to the DNR in February 2018.

Roberto Ciambetti first illegally travelled to Crimea in October 2016 as part of the delegation of around 20 Italian politicians and businessmen. While in Crimea, Ciambetti, who is also President of the Regional Council of Veneto, signed – together with the EU-sanctioned “Chairman of State Council of the Republic of Crimea” Vladimir Konstantinov – a joint statement on the development of interregional cooperation. Ciambetti also participated in the Yalta

29 “Zakharchenko Meets Politicians and Social Activists from Russia, Germany and Norway”, *DAN*, 19 February (2018), <https://dan-news.info/en/world-en/zakharchenko-meets-politicians-and-social-activists-from-russia-germany-and-norway.html>.

30 Stian Eisenrøger, Magnus Newth, Ole Kristian Strøm, “Norske aktivister får kritikk for tur til Krimhalvøya”, *VG*, 6 October (2017), <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/utenriks/russland/norske-aktivister-faar-kritikk-for-tur-til-krimhalvøya/a/24156607/>.



American observer Gilbert Doctorow at the Simferopol airport

International Economic Forum (YIEF) in April 2016. In January 2018, Ciambetti and several other politicians presented the YIEF at the European Parliament.³¹

A member of the regional parliament of Veneto, Stefano Valdegamberi illegally visited Crimea in April 2016, and, after upon his return, was reported to have initiated a vote on recognising Crimea as part of Russia in the Veneto parliament. Together with Ciambetti, he was part of the delegation of Italian politicians and businessmen that visited Crimea in October 2016. He also observed regional elections in Russia in September 2017.

Aleksandrs Gapoņenko is co-chair of the Congress of Russian Communities in Latvia and has been involved in pro-Kremlin activities mostly in the Baltic states. According to the Latvia security services, Gapoņenko promoted the narrative of the Second World War “in accordance with the Russian understanding of history” and “attempted to popularise the opinion of alleged ‘discrimination of ethnic minorities’ in Latvia”.³²

Dragana Trifković is the head of the Belgrade Centre of Strategic Research and a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled media. She was one of the observers of the so-called parliamentary elections in the DNR in November

31 “Izmeneniya v rossiyskom Krymu otsenili v Evroparlamente”, *Lenta*, 23 January (2018), https://lenta.ru/news/2018/01/23/evroparlamenty_krimea/.

32 “Annual Report about the Activities of the Security Police in 2013” (Riga: Security Police, 2014), p. 10.

2014. In October 2015, she illegally visited Crimea as part of a delegation from Serbia that featured politicians from the ultranationalist Serbian Movement Dveri and national-conservative Democratic Party of Serbia.

Gilbert Doctorow is a co-founder of the American Committee for East-West Accord and a regular contributor to the fiercely pro-Kremlin and anti-Semitic Russia Insider website. Doctorow was involved in attempts to bring together far-right and far-left pro-Kremlin activists.

Foreign observation of the presidential election in Crimea as propaganda

Since the Russian presidential election in Crimea was not considered legitimate by the international community in general, it is viable to suggest that, by sending foreign observers to Crimea, the Kremlin pursued two objectives. The first objective was to provide a sense of legitimacy to the presidential election in Crimea for the domestic, i.e. Russian, as well as Crimean audience. Since foreign observers (including those from established and reputable organisations) monitored the presidential election across Russia, they had to be also present in Crimea, in order to show that it was not different from “other Russian regions”. In this case, the “quality”, i.e. credibility and integrity, of the “Crimean observers” was not important for the Kremlin. The second objective was alluded to by Leonid Slutsky when he said that the voice of foreign observers, who advocated the legitimacy of “Crimea’s reunification with Russia”, would be heard in the international community.³³ What he implied was that foreign observers would attempt to legitimise the annexation of Crimea in their home countries and internationally.

The pursuit of both objectives relied heavily on the media coverage of the activities of foreign observers in Crimea. Quite expectedly, in stark contrast to electoral observers from established monitoring organisations, “Crimean observers” started giving complimentary comments on the electoral process not only before the voting officially finished at 8pm, but even before the election day.

Speaking to the Russian media on the 16th of March, Lars Peder Bjørndal Hol-lænder, who had observed elections in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyz Republic as part of the OSCE ODIHR election observation missions in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively, implicitly praised the upcoming election, as he said that he came to Crimea “to personally make sure that the electoral process was fair and

33 Laru, Galanina, “Krym ne ostavyat bez nablyudeniya”.



French observers Éric Doligé (left) and Jacques Myard (right) at Simferopol airport.

transparent”.³⁴ Also on the 16th of March, i.e. two days before the Election Day, Johan Bäckman claimed that the electoral process went fine: “I can say that the elections are extremely transparent. [...] The elections are well organised. [...] Everything is organised in a positive way, I do not see any problems”.³⁵

Political agenda of the foreign observation in Crimea was also notable in the comments of electoral monitors on the eve of the Election Day. One of the political messages was an argument that Russia-annexed Crimea was peaceful. Thus, Elias Demetriou claimed that “the situation in Crimea [was] calm” and that “the peninsula [was] ready for the Russian presidential election”.³⁶ Marco Marsili, who had participated in the OSCE ODIHR election observation missions in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic in 2016 and 2017 respectively, argued that he was going to Crimea “without worries, as [he] knew that it [was] absolutely safe” there. He added that the situation in Crimea was “peaceful and

34 “Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli rasskazali, zachem priekhali v Krym”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 16 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/society/20180316/1114038754.html>.

35 “Finskiy pravozashchitnik porabotaet nablyudatelem na vyborakh v Krymu”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 16 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180316/1114034584.html>.

36 “V Sevastopol’ pribyla delegatsiya nablyudateley s Kipra”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 17 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180317/1114042851.html>.

calm”.³⁷ In his turn, Hendrik Weber alleged that the international community presented Russia as a bogeyman, but that was wearing off.³⁸

Jacques Myard also made it clear that that the trip of the French delegation to Crimea was something more than just the electoral observation, as he suggested that visiting polling stations in all Crimea’s regions was related to their objective “to bring balance to the relations between Europe and Russia”.³⁹

On the Election Day, the narratives pushed by the foreign observers shifted towards the claims that the turnout was high and that there was a correlation between the presumably high turnout at the presidential election and the alleged legitimacy of the “referendum” in 2014.

In their comments to the Russian media, Alexander Grönlund and Nishan Selvaraj highlighted the high turnout, while Grönlund also presumed that the voters were happy and that the election was legitimate.⁴⁰ Long queues at polling stations were “a welcome surprise” for Diana Lutsker, who said that the election looked like a festive occasion.⁴¹ Andreas Maurer directly linked the alleged high turnout to the “referendum”, as he said that the presidential election in 2018 “would once again affirm the choice made by the Crimean people at the 2014 referendum”.⁴² The same argument was voiced by Ikhlas Mohammad Tamim.⁴³

The foreign observers’ comments made after the voting finished were essentially the same they made before and during the Election Day.

Conclusion

The greater part of the international community does not recognise the “Russian status” of Ukraine’s Autonomous Republic of Crimea annexed by Russia in March 2014. Therefore, reputable monitoring organisations did not send any missions to observe the Russian presidential election in Crimea held on the 18th of March 2018.

37 “Inostrannykh nablyudateley v Sevastopole zainteresoval Chernomorskiy flot”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 17 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180317/1114042756.html>.

38 “Nablyudatel’ iz Norveгии rasskazal, zachem edet v Krym na vybory”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 14 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180314/1114012145.html>.

39 “V Krym pribyli nablyudateli iz Evropy, Azii i SShA”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 17 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180317/1114044567.html>.

40 “Inostrannye nablyudateli podelilis’ pervymi vpechatleniyami o vyborakh v Krymu”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 18 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180318/1114046870.html>.

41 Ibid.

42 “Na Zapade boyatsya vysokoy yavki v Krymu – nablyudatel’ iz Germanii”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 18 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/politics/20180318/1114050737.html>.

43 “Nablyudatel’ iz Afganistana: ya s uvazheniem otnoshus’ k vyboru krymchan”, *RIA Novosti Krym*, 18 March (2018), <http://crimea.ria.ru/society/20180318/1114052985.html>.

Aiming to give domestic and international legitimacy to the election in Crimea, the Russian authorities invited, via a number of organisations, 43 foreign observers who obtained accreditation from the CEC and illegally travelled to Crimea to monitor the electoral process there. The CEC has not published a full list of the foreign observers in Crimea yet, but, out of 43 foreign observers, we have identified 35 of them. The analysis of the list of the identified observers shows that, while the majority of them have no political affiliation, 14 of them represent nearly all ideological convictions ranging from the far left through the centre-left and centre-right to the far right. At the same time, at least 12 of them have previously been engaged in pro-Kremlin activities aimed at promoting Moscow's foreign policy interests that include, but are not limited to, the attempts to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The pro-Kremlin activities of particular foreign monitors involved participation in the observation of illegitimate electoral processes in Crimea and DNR, illegal visits to these Ukrainian territories, pro-Kremlin commentaries for the Russian state-controlled media, and promotion of the Kremlin's foreign policy interests in their respective societies.

As the main objective of inviting foreign observers was giving legitimacy to otherwise illegitimate electoral process, Russian media actively spread propagandistic narratives of the invited foreign observers in the Russian and international media space.

In general, the foreign observation mission in Crimea fell short of the expectations of the Russian authorities, as they promised to bring more acting parliamentarians and politicians to Crimea to observe the presidential election. In March 2014, more than 30 foreign parliamentarians and politicians – predominantly representing European far-right parties and organisations – observed the Crimean “referendum”, but in 2018 the Russian authorities largely failed to mobilise them for the “Crimean cause”.



Politically biased foreign electoral observation at the Russian 2018 presidential election

Report by Anton Shekhovtsov

Executive summary

- 1513 foreign electoral observers monitored the Russian 2018 presidential election which constitutes the largest foreign electoral monitoring mission in Russia's history. 598 of these observers were deployed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR); 363 observers were sent by other international organisations; 65 monitors represented observers from national election committees from 26 countries and 2 disputed territories; and 482 monitors were invited by the lower (State Duma) and upper (Federation Council) houses of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.
- Several Russian organisations formally not affiliated with the Russian authorities, in particular, CIS-EMO, the Civic Control Association and the National Social Monitoring, actively participated in recruiting and coordinating foreign observers who were officially invited by the Federal Assembly. Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky and his deputy Aleksey Chepa mediated between those formally non-state organisations and the Federal Assembly, although Slutsky invited several observers himself through his personal networks.



International observers in the Kuban region: (left to right) Hans-Wilhelm Dünn (Cyber-Sicherheitsrat Deutschland e.V.), Mylène Troszczynski (National Front), head of the Kuban election commission, Aleksey Chernenko, Alexander Von Bismarck and Jaromír Kohlíček, Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia).

Source: <http://ikk.ru/news/mezhdunarodnye-nablyudateli-ot-evropejskogo-parlamenta-i-mezhdunarodnyh-obshhestvennyh-obedinenij-posetili-krasnodarskij-kraj>

- While Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) published a list of foreign observers present at the presidential elections, it refused to publicise the names of the foreign observers invited by the Federal Assembly. However, using OSINT methods we have identified 160 foreign observers who monitored the presidential election in Russia (125 observers out of 439) and Russia-annexed Crimea (35 observers out of 43). The majority of these observers are members of political parties from across the political spectrum, ranging from the far left through the centre-left and centre-right to the far right.
- The analysis of 92 profiles of European, American and Japanese monitors who observed the election in Russia shows that at the least 68 of them had been previously involved in different pro-Kremlin activities, either personally or through their membership in certain political organisations. Those pro-Kremlin activities include, but are not limited to, participation in politically biased or illegitimate electoral observation missions organised by the Russian pro-Kremlin actors; illegal visits to annexed Crimea and occupied

parts of Eastern Ukraine; public calls to lift the EU sanctions imposed on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine; active engagement with the Russian state-controlled media; public support for Russia's backing of the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

- The analysis of Russian media reports on the presidential election and profiles of the foreign observers invited by the Federation Assembly suggests that they were invited to Russia for three main reasons: (1) Russian media needed favourable comments from foreign observers already on the day of the election to demonstrate that the voting proceeded in a calm and orderly manner; (2) Russian media needed Kremlin-friendly foreign observers to relativise or neutralise any criticism of the presidential election from other foreign observers, especially from the OSCE/ODIHR, after the voting was over; (3) Russian media and Russian official sources used favourable comments from the observers invited by the Federation Assembly to disinform the Russian audience about the international perception of the electoral process in Russia.

Introduction

In comparison to the previous elections in the Russian Federation, the presidential election on 18 March 2018 was characterised, among other things, by the increased number of foreign electoral observers. According to a member of Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) Nikolay Levichev, the CEC issued accreditations for 1529 foreign observers.¹ However, as Levichev stated, the OSCE withdrew several short-term observers, and, on the day of the election, 1513 foreign observers from 115 countries monitored the Russian presidential election.²

Russian official sources claim that 14 international organisations provided foreign observers. However, not only international organisations, but also other institutions provided foreign observers to monitor the Russian presidential election, see Table 1.

1 Valentina Egorova, "Svoimi glazami", *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 18 March (2018), <https://rg.ru/2018/03/18/za-vyborami-v-rf-sledilo-rekordnoe-chislo-mezhdunarodnyh-nabliudatelej.html>.

2 Ibid.

Table 1. Organisations and institutions that officially invited or provided foreign observers to monitor the Russian presidential election held on 16 March 2018

Organisation/institution	No. of observers
Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)	117
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)	481
Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	246
Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS	40
Shanghai Cooperation Organisation	26
Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Belarus and Russia	25
Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation	9
Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation	5
Arab Organisation for Electoral Management Bodies	4
Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy	2
Association of European Election Officials	2
Association of Asian Election Authorities	2
Association of World Election Bodies	2
Central Election Commission of Azerbaijan	2
Central Election Commission of Armenia	2
Central Election Commission of Belarus	2
Central Election Commission of Kazakhstan	2
Central Election and Referenda Commission of Kyrgyzstan	2
Central Election Commission of Moldova	2
Central Election and Referenda Commission of Tajikistan	2
Central Election and Referenda Commission of Turkmenistan	1
Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan	3
Central Election Commission of Abkhazia ³	1
Central Election Commission of South Ossetia ⁴	2
Central Election Commission of Bulgaria	5
Supreme Electoral Tribunal of Bolivia	2
Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina	2
National Election Commission of Hungary	2
Central Electoral Board of the Dominican Republic	2
Election Commission of India	2
Central Election Commission of Indonesia	2
Independent Election Commission of Jordan	3
Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq	3
National Election Committee of Cambodia	2
National Electoral Institute of Mexico	1

3 The “Republic of Abkhazia” is not recognised as an independent state by the international community.

4 The “Republic of South Ossetia” is not recognised as an independent state by the international community.

Organisation/institution	No. of observers
General Election Commission of Mongolia	3
Superior Electoral Tribunal of Paraguay	2
National Electoral Commission of Poland	2
National Election Commission of South Korea	8
National Electoral Council of Ecuador	2
Electoral Commission of South Africa	1
Delegation of observers from China	5
State Duma of the Federal Assembly of Russia	318
Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of Russia	164
TOTAL	1513

Sources:

<https://rg.ru/2018/03/18/za-vyborami-v-rf-sledilo-rekordnoe-chislo-mezhdunarodnyh-nabliudatelej.html>

<https://iz.ru/721447/angelina-galanina-natalia-portiakova-dmitrii-laru-tatiana-baikova/nabliudateli-am-dali-polnuuu-svobodu>

<https://www.pnp.ru/politics/vybory-2018-master-klass-dlya-zapada.html>

<https://www.pnp.ru/politics/gosduma-priglasila-318-inostrannykh-nablyudateley-na-vybory-prezidenta-zayavil-sluckiy.html>

<http://vm.ru/news/472613.html>

<http://cikrf.ru/analog/prezidentskiye-vybory-2018/nablyudenie-za-vyborami/mezhdunarodnoe-nablyudenie/nablyudateli.pdf>

According to Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky, more than 500 foreign observers monitored the Russian presidential election on the invitation of the Federal Assembly of Russia, i.e. both lower house (State Duma) and upper house (Federation Council) of the Russian parliament.⁵ (The number 500 was later proved to be false: according to the CEC, 482, rather than 500, foreign observers monitored the election on the invitation from the Federal Assembly of Russia.) Commenting on the observers invited by the State Duma, Slutsky stated: “These are well-known people, who cannot be suspected or, by any stretch, accused of political bias”.⁶ In January 2018, a member of the CEC Vasiliy Likhachev voiced a similar opinion talking about individual foreign observers not affiliated with any international organisation: “These are not some pro-Russian politicians. We are talking about people who

5 “Pol’skiy nablyudatel’ na vyborakh: ya ne nashel, k chemu pridrat’sya”, *RIA Novosti*, 18 March (2018), https://ria.ru/radio_brief/20180318/1516657092.html.

6 *Gosduma priglasila 318 inostrannykh nablyudateley na vybory prezidenta, zayavil Slutsky, Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 5 March (2018), <https://www.pnp.ru/politics/gosduma-priglasila-318-inostrannykh-nablyudateley-na-vybory-prezidenta-zayavil-sluckiy.html>.

have experience of monitoring elections, are legally competent and understand electoral technologies”.⁷

However, political, ideological and professional positions, as well as personal connections, of many observers among those invited by the Russian Federal Assembly raise serious doubts as to their impartiality and credibility as electoral monitors, and this report outlines these doubts.

Individual foreign observers at the 2018 Russian presidential election

On 6 April 2018, the CEC published a list of foreign monitors who took part in the observation of the Russian presidential election. However, the list featured names of only 1031 observers, even though the CEC claimed that it had issued accreditations to 1532 foreigners. The 482 missing names of observers were exactly the monitors invited to observe the election by the Russian Federal Assembly, and it is unclear why the CEC decided not to include them in the list of foreign observers.

Nevertheless, the analysis of Russian and foreign media reports, as well as social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, allowed us to identify 160 foreign observers invited by the Russian Federal Assembly to monitor the Russian presidential election, see Table 2.

Table 2. Identified foreign observers invited by the Federation Assembly at the Russian presidential election (excluding Russia-annexed Crimea)⁸

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation	Region/city of observation
1	Argentina	Fernando Riva Mendoza	*unknown	Perm
2	Argentina	Pablo Vilas	“La Cámpora” organisation	Krasnodar
3	Armenia	Lilit Beglaryan	Republican Party of Armenia	Yekaterinburg
4	Armenia	Vardan Khachatryan	*unknown	Yaroslavl

7 Dmitry Laru, Angelina Galanina, Tatyana Baykova, “Bolee 150 inostrannykh deputatov posetyat prezidentskie vybory v Rossii”, *Izvestiya*, 22 January (2018), <https://iz.ru/697617/dmitrii-laru-angelina-galanina-tatiana-baikova/bolee-150-inostrannykh-deputatov-posetiat-prezidentskie-vybory-v-rossii>.

8 For the analysis of foreign observers in Russia-annexed Crimea, see Anton Shekhovtsov, “Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate Presidential Election in Crimea in March 2018”, *EPDE*, 3 April (2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/foreign-observation-of-the-illegitimate-presidential-election-in-crimea-in-march-2018-1375.html>.

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation	Region/city of observation
5	Austria	Stefan Karner	*unknown	Vologda
6	Austria	Zeljko Malesevic	Freedom Party of Austria	Omsk
7	Belarus	Sergey Lushch	"Young Russia" movement	Tula
8	Belgium	Aldo Carcaci	People's Party	Moscow
9	Belgium	Philip Dewinter	Flemish Interest	Moscow
10	Belgium	Philippe Chansay Wilmotte	*unknown	Vladikavkaz
11	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Staša Košarac	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats	Moscow
12	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Milovan Peulić	Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining of the Republic of Srpska	Tula
13	Brazil	Devanir Cavalcante de Lima	*unknown	Krasnoyarsk
14	Bulgaria	Ivaylo Dinev	dVERSIA website	Voronezh
15	Bulgaria	Vanya Dobрева	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Novosibirsk
16	Bulgaria	Nikolay Draganov	*unknown	Vologda
17	Bulgaria	Mirena Filipova	*unknown	Vologda
18	Bulgaria	Pencho Plamenov Milkov	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Vladikavkaz
19	Bulgaria	Kaloyan Pargov	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Novosibirsk
20	Bulgaria	Lora Radeva	*unknown	*unknown
21	Bulgaria	Svetlana Sharenkova	Bulgarian Socialist Party	St. Petersburg
22	Bulgaria	Alexandar Tikhomirov Simov	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Tula
23	Bulgaria	Bojan Stanisławski	Strajk.eu website	Vologda
24	Bulgaria	Irena Todorova Anastasova	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Vladikavkaz
25	China	Pan Dawei	Russia and Central Asia Research Center, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences	Smolensk
26	China	Shen Guomin	Shanghai People's Congress	Smolensk
27	China	Shao Ning	<i>Xinmin Wanbao</i> newspaper	Smolensk
28	China	Qian Xiao-Yun	Shanghai Institutes for International Studies	Smolensk
29	China	Li Yihai	Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences	Smolensk
30	China	Li Yongquan	Institute of Russian, Eastern European & Central Asian Studies	Smolensk
31	Congo	Patrick Nkanga Bekonda	Youth League of the People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy	Yaroslavl
32	Costa Rica	Ernesto Jiménez Morales	Costa Rica Trade and Tourism Chamber	Samara
33	Czech Republic	Jaromír Kohlíček	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	Krasnodar
34	Egypt	Abdel Rahim Ali	Al Bawba News website, Middle East Studies Centre	*unknown
35	France	Louis Aliot	National Front	*unknown
36	France	Bruno Bilde	National Front	*unknown
37	France	Maurice Bonnot	Institute of Democracy and Cooperation	Altay
38	France	Yves Pozzo di Borgo	Union of Democrats and Independents, French-Russian Dialogue Association	*unknown
39	France	Patrick Brunot	*unknown	Altay
40	France	Jean Cadet	French-Russian Dialogue Association	Kaluga

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation	Region/city of observation
41	France	Gilbert Collard	National Front	Krasnodar
42	France	Joël Guerriau	The Republicans	Vladimir
43	France	Elie Hatem	Action Française	*unknown
44	France	Denis Jacquat	The Republicans	Kaluga
45	France	Dimitri de Kochko	*unknown	*unknown
46	France	Thierry Mariani	The Republicans	Moscow
47	France	Alain Marleix	The Republicans	Kaluga
48	France	Alesya Miloradovich	*unknown	Altay
49	France	Ludovic Pajot	National Front	*unknown
50	France	Véronique Rouez	*unknown	Altay
51	France	Mylène Troszczynski	National Front	Krasnodar
52	France	Jean-Michel Vernochet	*unknown	Altay
53	Germany	Wilfried Bergmann	German-Russian Forum	Saratov
54	Germany	Alexander Von Bismarck	Christian Democratic Union of Germany	Krasnodar
55	Germany	Hans-Wilhelm Dünn	Cyber-Sicherheitsrat Deutschland e.V.	Krasnodar
56	Germany	Dietmar Friedhoff	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
57	Germany	Anton Friesen	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
58	Germany	Markus Frohnaier	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
59	Germany	Waldemar Herdt	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
60	Germany	Steffen Kotré	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
61	Germany	Cyrrill Pech	*unknown	Nizhniy Novgorod
62	Germany	Robby Schlund	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
63	Greece	Maria Antoniou	New Democracy	Yaroslavl
64	India	Sunil Ambekar	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad organisation	*unknown
65	India	Ashok Modak	University of Mumbai	Tver
66	India	Obaidur Rahaman	Jawaharlal Nehru University	*unknown
67	India	Monish Tourangbam	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	Velikiy Novgorod
68	Iran	Izanlu Hassan Abdollali ⁹	*unknown	Pskov
69	Ireland	Tom Kitt	Fianna Fáil	Moscow
70	Italy	Fabrizio Bertot	Forza Italia	Moscow
71	Italy	Claudio D'Amico	Northern League	Moscow
72	Italy	Gianmatteo Ferrari	Northern League	Moscow
73	Italy	Gian Luigi Ferretti	General Labour Union	Tver
74	Italy	Stefano Maullu	Forza Italia	*unknown
75	Italy	Alessandro Musolino	Forza Italia	Leningrad region
76	Italy	Fabio Pasinetti	Oltre la linea website	Nizhniy Novgorod

9 This name was transliterated from Russian.

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation	Region/city of observation
77	Italy	Gianluca Savoini	Northern League	Moscow
78	Japan	Mitsuhiro Kimura	Issuikai movement	Sykytykvar
79	Jordan	Haleb Hasan	*unknown	Moscow
80	Kazakhstan	Bakhytzhhan Zhumagulov	"Nur Otan" Democratic People's Party	*unknown
81	Latvia	Andrejs Mamikins	Social Democratic Party "Harmony"	*unknown
82	Latvia	Miroslavs Mitrofanovs	Latvian Russian Union	*unknown
83	Latvia	Tatjana Ždanoka	Latvian Russian Union	*unknown
84	Lebanon	Nabil Nicolas	Change and Reform bloc	*unknown
85	Lebanon	Imad Rizk	*unknown	Pskov
86	Mali	Oumar Mariko	African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence	*unknown
87	Mongolia	Ninj Demberel	Mongolian People's Party	Perm
88	Mongolia	Danzan Luzhedanzan	*unknown	*unknown
89	Netherlands	Jan Herman Brinks	*unknown	Moscow
90	Pakistan	Zahid Hamid	Pakistan Muslim League	*unknown
91	Palestine	Nabil Shaath	*unknown	Moscow
92	Paraguay	Humberto Paredes	National Youth Secretariat	Yaroslavl
93	Poland	Dimitris Dimitriadis	*unknown	Tver
94	Poland	Małgorzata Kulbaczewska-Figat	Strajk.eu website	Tver
95	Poland	Maciej Wiśniowski	Strajk.eu website, Sputnik Polska	Tver
96	Portugal	Duarte Pacheco	Social Democratic Party	Moscow
97	Serbia	Veroljub Arsić	Serbian Progressive Party	Moscow
98	Serbia	Dušan Bajatović	Srbijagas	Leningrad region
99	Serbia	Dubravko Bojić	Serbian Radical Party	*unknown
100	Serbia	Milovan Drecun	Serbian Progressive Party	*unknown
101	Serbia	Vladimir Đukanović	Serbian Progressive Party	*unknown
102	Serbia	Miloš Đurin	Democratic Party of Serbia	Perm
103	Serbia	Vesna Ivković	Socialist Party of Serbia	*unknown
104	Serbia	Dragana Odović	Serbian Progressive Party	*unknown
105	Serbia	Ognjen Pantović	Serbian People's Party	Voronezh
106	Serbia	Lazar Popović	Serbian People's Party	Voronezh
107	Serbia	Mladen Savić	Democratic Party of Serbia	Voronezh
108	Serbia	Aleksandar Šešelj	Serbian Radical Party	*unknown
109	Serbia	Danijela Stojadinović	Socialist Party of Serbia	*unknown
110	Singapore	Rupakjyoti Borah	National University of Singapore	Tver
111	Slovakia	Ján Čarnogurský	Slovak-Russian association	Yaroslavl
112	Slovakia	Marek Krajčí	Ordinary People and Independent Personalities	Saratov
113	Spain	Pedro Agramunt	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)	*unknown
114	Spain	Borja de Arístegui	Lebanese International University	Krasnogorsk

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation	Region/city of observation
115	Spain	Pedro Mourinho	IberAtlantic Global Corporation	Moscow
116	Spain	Jordi Xuclà i Costa	Catalan European Democratic Party	*unknown
117	South Africa	Archibold Jomo Nyambi	African National Congress	*unknown
118	Sweden	Sanna Hill	Free West Media website	Moscow
119	Sweden	Vavra Suk	<i>Nya Tider</i> magazine, Free West Media website	Moscow
120	Switzerland	Emmanuel Kilchenmann	Kilchenmann & Co.	*unknown
121	Syria	Samir Nasir	National Council of Syria	*unknown
122	Turkey	Sedat Kara	Istanbul Commerce University	Novosibirsk
123	United Kingdom	Janice Atkinson	Europe of Nations and Freedom group	*unknown
124	USA	G. Kline Preston IV	Kline Preston Law Group	Vladimir
125	USA	Elie Rubinstein	Emergency USA	Moscow

While the invitations to these observers were signed by the Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin and Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Ilyas Umakhanov, one of the main officials behind inviting them was Leonid Slutsky who played two roles. The first role was to invite high-profile international observers whom he knew personally and with whom he already worked previously (for example, Thierry Mariani, Pedro Agramunt and Jordi Xuclà i Costa, see below).

Slutsky's second role was that of an intermediary – sometimes via deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Aleksey Chepa – between, on the one hand, Volodin and Umakhanov, and, on the other, several Russian organisations that invited individual international observers. These organisations include, but are not limited to, (1) CIS-EMO/Public Diplomacy headed by Aleksey Kochetkov and Stanislav Byshok; (2) the “Civic Control” Association headed by Aleksandr Brod; and (3) the National Social Monitoring (NSM) headed by Alexander Zakuskin.

These and, highly likely, other facilitating agencies contacted potential international observers, sent them application forms and then forwarded those forms to Slutsky or Chepa who then passed them to Volodin and Umakhanov who signed official invitations required to either to obtain Russian visas or justify their entry into Russia during the border control. According to the statements from CIS-EMO and “Civic Control”, their organisations invited 24¹⁰ and around

10 “Missiya nezavisimykh nablyudateley na vyborakh Prezidenta RF”, *Public Diplomacy*, 4 April (2018), <http://www.publicdiplomacy.su/2018/04/04/missiya-nezavisimiyh-nablyudateley-na-vyiborah-prezidenta-rf/>.



Members of the monitoring mission coordinated by CIS-EMO: (left to right) Louis Aliot (National Front, France), Stanislav Byshok (CIS-EMO), Janice Atkinson (Europe of Nations and Freedom group), Gian Luigi Ferretti (General Labour Union) and Elie Hatem (Action Française).

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1619368391517214&set=a.264165380370862.64345.100003322056510&type=3&permP age=1>

20¹¹ foreign observers respectively. At the moment, it is unknown how many foreign observers were invited by the NSM or any other facilitating agency.

Inviting foreign observers outside of established international organisations follows a long tradition of using alternative mechanisms and practices for international election observer missions that aim to give legitimacy to the electoral processes – both in Russia and in other countries, which the Kremlin considers its sphere of influence – that lack, to various degrees, essential characteristics of being free and/or fair.

CIS-EMO and “Civic Control” already had experience of inviting and cooperating with this type of observers: CIS-EMO has been working in this area since 2003, while “Civic Control” has been active since 2007. Their main task has always been relativisation of results of electoral monitoring missions of the OSCE/ODIHR. In the perspective of Roman Kupchinsky, the creation of CIS-EMO

11 “Grazhdanskiy kontrol nameren privezti ekspertov Evropy na prezidentskie vybory”, *Federal'noe agentstvo novostey*, 18 January (2018), <https://riafan.ru/1017193-grazhdanskiy-kontrol-nameren-privezti-ekspertov-iz-evropy-na-prezidentskie-vybory>.

was underpinned by the many discrepancies between the electoral monitoring results of the OSCE and the Kremlin-dominated Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS (IPA CIS): “a ‘neutral’ NGO [i.e. CIS-EMO] was needed to lend legitimacy to the official [IPA CIS] reports and to thereby reinforce Russian policy goals”.¹² According to Nicu Popescu, the Russian authorities had been “boosting [...] CIS-EMO whose verdicts for elections conducted in the CIS [had] always been diametrically opposed to OSCE opinions on the elections”.¹³

Particular statements of the heads of CIS-EMO and “Civic Control” evidently manifest – sometimes ideological – distrust towards OSCE/ODIHR electoral monitoring missions. Speaking at a press conference after the 2018 presidential election, Kochetkov made an ambiguous statement with a reference to the observers that CIS-EMO invited to observe the election: “Now, of course, Western media will be criticising those observers who came to [monitor] our elections not from the OSCE. For some reason, an opinion has been established that only those people who are affiliated with the US State Department. So, if a structure affiliated with the State Department sends its observers, this means they are [real] observers, while all the others are nobodies, they don’t have a mandate”.¹⁴ (Among other things, Kochetkov’s ironic complaint was indeed odd for one main reason: the OSCE is not affiliated with the US State Department, while Russian Federation is itself a member of the OSCE.) In his turn, already in 2012, Brod argued: “Representatives of the OSCE/ODIHR often come with pre-readied assessments, and, in the first instance, they are negatively predisposed towards elections in Russia and Belarus. Pre-readied intentions to recognise elections as illegitimate – this possibly means that these are tendentious politicians, rather than international observers”.¹⁵ These and other similar statements reflect an obvious resentment – on the part of certain Russian electoral monitoring organisations closely working with the Russian authorities – about the internationally recognised credibility and reputation of the OSCE/ODIHR.

12 Roman Kupchinsky, “Monitoring the Election Monitors”, in Ingmar Bredies, Andreas Umland, Valentin Yakushik (eds.), *Aspects of the Orange Revolution V: Institutional Observation Reports on the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2007), pp. 223–227 (227).

13 Nicu Popescu, “Russia’s Soft Power Ambitions”, *CEPS Policy Brief*, No. 115 (2006), p. 2.

14 “Itogi raboty missii mezhdunarodnykh nablyudateley na vyborakh Prezidenta RF”, *Rossia segodnya*, 19 March (2018), <http://pressmia.ru/pressclub/20180319/951895487.html>.

15 “Vybory v Rossii. Ekspert: Oranzhevaya revolyutsiya – eto udel sytykh, udel sytoy intelligentsia”, *Stolichnoe televidenie*, 4 March (2012), <http://www.ctv.by/новости/выборы-в-россии-эксперт-оранжевая-революция—это-удел-сытых-удел-сытой-интеллигенции>.

Established involvement of “Federation Assembly observers” in pro-Kremlin efforts

A number of European, American and Japanese actors who observed the presidential election in Russia upon the invitation of the Federation Assembly have a record of previous involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts that involve, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and elsewhere;
- legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine);
- criticism of the American and European sanctions imposed on Russia in relation to its aggression towards Ukraine;
- cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.);
- membership in Western and Russian pro-Kremlin organisations, movements and groups.

As a PACE rapporteur on Azerbaijan, **Pedro Agramunt** observed the 2010 parliamentary elections in that country and claimed that he did not see any problems with the elections,¹⁶ although the OSCE/ODIHR concluded that “the conditions necessary for a meaningful democratic election were not established” in Azerbaijan.¹⁷ In March 2017, **Agramunt**, as PACE president, travelled to Syria – together with **Jordi Xuclà i Costa**¹⁸ – to meet with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad backed by Russia; the trip was organised by Slutsky who took **Agramunt** and several other members of the delegation to Syria on a Russian military plane.

16 “Assembly of Political Corruption: How Azerbaijani Bribes and Russian Interests Were Found in PACE”, *Caviar Diplomacy*, 24 April (2017), http://caviar-diplomacy.net/azerbaijan/en_US/ассамблея-политической-коррупции-ка/.

17 “Azerbaijan’s Elections, though Peaceful with Opposition Participation, Did Not Mark Meaningful Progress in Democratic Development”, OSCE, 8 November (2010), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/74100>.

18 “El PPB retira su confianza a Agramunt por su viaje a Siria”, *Levante*, 26 June (2017), <http://www.levante-emv.com/comunitat-valenciana/2017/06/26/ppe-retira-confianza-agramunt-viaje/1585710.html>.

French former MP **Thierry Marini** was one of the founding members of the questionable European Academy for Election Observation that, like Agramunt, positively assessed the fraudulent 2010 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan. **Marini** is the head of the openly pro-Kremlin French-Russian Dialogue Association, the members of which include Leonid Slutsky. In April 2015, Slutsky brought **Mariani** to Moscow who would say that the “anti-Russian” sanctions had to be lifted. In July 2015, **Mariani** illegally travelled to Crimea as part of a larger French delegation.¹⁹ **Mariani**’s both trips (to Russia and Crimea) were fully funded by the Russian Peace Foundation (RPF) headed by Slutsky.²⁰ In December 2015, **Mariani** led a delegation of 17 French politicians to Moscow, also upon the invitation from the RPF. Moreover, he participated in electoral observation missions organised by Kochetkov’s CIS-EMO.

Czech MEP **Jaromír Kohlíček** consistently called for the lifting of the “anti-Russian” sanctions and took part, in 2016, in the Russian propaganda event titled “Second Yalta International Economic Forum” held in Russia-annexed Crimea. In September 2017, he was part of the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia. In March 2017, he visited Syria together Agramunt and Slutsky to meet Russia-backed Syrian leader Assad. In January 2018, **Kohlíček** organised a conference at the European Parliament, in which he presented the Yalta International Economic Forum.

Zeljko Malešević is a member of the Austrian far-right Freedom Party that has been involved in various pro-Kremlin activities since at least 2008,²¹ and signed, in December 2016, a coordination and cooperation agreement with the Russian ruling party “United Russia”.

Belarusian **Sergey Lushch** is the chairman of the anti-Western, pro-Kremlin organisation “Young Rus”.

A Belgian MP and member of the far-right People’s Party **Aldo Carcaci** authored, in 2016, a resolution calling on the Belgian government to lift the “anti-Russian” sanctions imposed by the European Union.²² The resolution was

- 19 Halya Coynash, “French Collaborators Kiss Monument to Russian Invaders of Crimea”, *Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group*, 31 July (2016), <http://khp.org/en/index.php?id=1469924085>.
- 20 “Frantsuzskie deputaty vystupili v Moskve v podderzhku politiki Rossii”, *RBC*, 9 April (2015), <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/09/04/2015/552668fa9a7947cca2177670>; “Glava frantsuzskoy parlamentskoy delegatsii rasskazal o tselyakh vizita v Krym”, *TASS*, 22 July (2015), <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/2134645>.
- 21 Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Eva Zelechowski, Michel Reimon, *Putins rechte Freunde: wie Europas Populisten ihre Nationen* (Vienna: Falter Verlag, 2017).
- 22 “Belgian Legislators May Consider Call to Lift Anti-Russian Sanctions”, *Sputnik*, 24 July (2016), <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201607241043554261-sanctions-belgium-russia/>.

Belgian observer from the far-right Flemish Interest party Philip Dewinter (left) and Leonid Slutsky.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/fdwvb/photos/a.714948295217877.1073741826.103536906359022/1756681507711212/>



later rejected by the Belgian parliament. In February 2017, **Carcaci** was part of the Belgian delegation that voiced their support for the regime of the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and praised Russia's backing of the regime.²³ In September that year, **Carcaci** was part of the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia. In January 2018, he participated in the presentation of the "Yalta International Economic Forum" organised by Jaromír Kohlíček in the European Parliament.

A member of the Flemish parliament and one of the leading members of the far-right Flemish Interest party **Philip Dewinter** called for lifting of the "anti-Russian" sanctions²⁴ and headed the Belgian delegation to Syria in February 2017.²⁵ Several members of the Flemish Interest observed the illegitimate "referendum" in Crimea and "parliamentary elections" in the occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine in 2014. In January 2018, **Dewinter** participated in the presentation of the "Yalta International Economic Forum" in the European Parliament.

23 "Belgische Abgeordnete in Aleppo: 'Die Russen helfen, wo sie können, und die EU überhaupt nicht'", *RT Deutsch*, 7 February (2017), <https://deutsch.rt.com/kurzclips/46206-belgische-abgeordnete-aleppo-russen-eu/>.

24 "Levée des sanctions antirusse: un projet de résolution présenté devant le Parlement belge", *Sputnik*, 29 January (2018), <https://fr.sputniknews.com/international/201801291034936993-resolution-levee-sanctions-russie-belgique/>.

25 "Belgische Politiker in Syrien: Russland befreit das Land und die EU schaut dem Terror hier nur zu", *RT Deutsch*, 9 February (2017), <https://deutsch.rt.com/kurzclips/46303-belgische-politiker-in-syrien-russland-eu/>.



Polish observers Małgorzata Kulbaczewska-Figat (left) and Maciej Wiśniowski (right).

Source: <http://tver.spravedlivo.ru/005155428.html>

Belgian lawyer **Philippe Chansay Wilmotte**, who is also the head of the far-right “Saint Michael Archangel Collective” and a small right-wing populist party “Citizen Liberal Values”, took part in the monitoring of the 2007 parliamentary elections in Russia; the observation mission was led by Polish pro-Kremlin activist Mateusz Piskorski. In 2007, **Wilmotte** also participated in the CIS-EMO mission in Transnistria occupied by the Russian “peace-keeping” forces.²⁶

Staša Košarac is Deputy Chairman of the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a member of the openly pro-Russian Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, a ruling party in the Republic of Srpska. The party signed cooperation agreements with the “United Russia” party and the ruling party of the Russia-backed “United Ossetia”.

Vanya Dobрева, Pencho Plamenov Milkov, Kaloyan Pargov, Svetlana Sharenkova, Alexandar Tikhomirov Simov and **Irena Todorova Anastasova** are members of the openly pro-Russian Bulgarian Socialist Party that opposes the EU sanctions imposed on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine.²⁷

26 “V Pridnestrov’ye pribyla mezhdunarodnaya gruppa yuristov”, *Press Obozrenie*, 10 May (2007), <https://press.try.md/item.php?id=84419>.

27 Tsvetelia Tsołova, “Socialists Say Bulgaria Pays High Price for EU’s Russia Sanctions”, *Reuters*, 17 March (2017), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-election-socialists/socialists-say-bulgaria-pays-high-price-for-eus-russia-sanctions-idUSKBN1601AA>.



French far-right electoral observers Louis Aliot (left) and Elie Hatem (right) with Russian ultranationalist presidential candidate Sergey Baburin.

Source: <https://twitter.com/SergeyBaburin/status/974915036643807237>

Moreover, **Milkov**, **Simov** and **Anastasova** are members of the pro-Kremlin “Bulgaria – Russia Friendship” group in the Bulgarian parliament, while **Sharenkova**, a recipient of the Friendship Order awarded by Putin, is also the head of the pro-Kremlin “Bulgaria-Russia Forum”.

Bojan Stanisławski and **Małgorzata Kulbaczewska-Figat** work for the Polish far-left website Strajk.eu edited by **Maciej Wiśniowski**. **Stanisławski** and **Wiśniowski** are contributors to the Polish edition of the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website, while **Wiśniowski** is an affiliated expert of Kochetkov’s Public Diplomacy project²⁸ and CIS-EMO.²⁹

French MPs **Louis Aliot**, **Bruno Bilde**, **Gilbert Collard** and **Ludovic Pajot**, as well as MEP **Mylène Troszczynski**, are members of the far-right, openly pro-Kremlin National Front (**Aliot** is its vice president and partner of its leader Marine Le Pen) that received a €9 million loan from a Russian bank in 2014, harshly criticised “anti-Russian” sanctions and supported all Kremlin’s domestic and international policies. In September 2017, **Bilde** took part in the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia.

28 “Ekspertny sovet”, *Public Diplomacy*, 18 March (2015), <http://www.publicdiplomacy.su/ekspertnyiy-sovet/>.

29 “Uchastniki”, *CIS-EMO*, <http://www.cis-emo.net/ru/uchastniki>.

French former diplomat **Maurice Bonnot** is a consultant of the Paris-based Institute of Democracy and Cooperation that is headed by Russian far-right former MP Natalia Narochnitskaya and aims to promote the Kremlin's foreign policy interests in Europe. **Bonnot** observed the illegitimate “parliamentary elections” in the “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”³⁰ and the illegitimate presidential elections in Russia-occupied South Ossetia³¹ in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

A former ambassador of France to Russia **Jean Cadet** and a member of the French Senate **Yves Pozzo di Borgo** are members of the pro-Kremlin French-Russian Dialogue Association headed by Thierry Mariani, with whom **di Borgo** illegally travelled to Crimea in July 2015. **Di Borgo**, as well as **Denis Jacquat** and **Alain Marleix**, participated in Mariani's propagandistic trip to Moscow upon the invitation from Slutsky in December 2015.³²

French lawyer **Patrick Brunot**, who represented Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in a libel case against a French newspaper, has been in contact with Russian ultranationalists since the 1990s. Together with Philippe Chansay Wilmotte, **Brunot** participated in the CIS-EMO mission in Transnistria in 2007,³³ and co-authored a report on Transnistria together with Luc Michel, the head of the pro-Kremlin electoral monitoring organisation Eurasian Observatory for Democracy and Elections. In September 2017, **Brunot** illegally visited Crimea and delivered a lecture at a university.

Elie Hatem, a member of the French far-right Action Française movement and former adviser to the ex-leader of the National Front Jean-Marie Le Pen, is an affiliated expert of Kochetkov's Public Diplomacy project.³⁴

French journalist **Dimitri de Kochko** was granted Russian citizenship by Putin in 2017. **De Kochko** is a co-founder of the Union of Russophones of France and a regular commentator for the French edition of the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website. He is an affiliated expert of the Public Diplomacy project and was part of the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia. Since 2014, **de Kochko** has been engaged in spreading disinformation

30 “Bako Sahakyan Receives Maurice Bonnot”, *Armenpress*, 19 May (2010), https://armenpress.am/eng/news/603943/Bako_Sahakyan_receives_Maurice_Bonnot.html.

31 “Konsul'tant Evropeyskogo instituta demokrati i sotrudnishestva: vybory glavy Yuzhnoy Osetii prokhodyat demokratichno”, *Ekho Kavkaza*, 27 November (2011), <https://www.ekhoavkaza.com/a/24403742.html>.

32 “17 parlementaires français se rendent à Moscou”, *Sputnik*, 16 December (2015), <https://fr.sputniknews.com/international/201512161020327053-mariani-dialogue-france-russie/>.

33 “V Pridnestrov'ye pribyla mezhdunarodnaya gruppa yuristov”.

34 “Ekspertny sovet”.

about Ukraine,³⁵ as well as attacking mainstream French media accusing them of “Russophobia”.³⁶

Alesya Miloradovich co-organised an illegal trip of 22 children from France to Russia-annexed Crimea in August 2016³⁷ and took part in the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia in September 2017.

Véronique Rouez took part in the CIS-EMO’s electoral monitoring mission at the Ukrainian parliamentary election in 2012.

French conspiracy theorist **Jean-Michel Vernochet** is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website and has supported Russia’s cooperation with Assad regime in Syria.

Dietmar Friedhoff, Anton Friesen, Markus Frohnmaier, Waldemar Herdt, Steffen Kotré and Robby Schlund are members of the far-right, openly pro-Kremlin Alternative for Germany party that has consistently called for the lifting of the “anti-Russian” sanctions. In May 2015, **Frohnmaier** participated in the conference “Donbass: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow” held in Russia-occupied part of Eastern Ukraine³⁸ and, in April in 2016, he took part in the Second Yalta International Economic Forum held in annexed Crimea. In February 2017, **Schlund** participated in a conference “against Russophobia in Germany” that justified the Russian occupation of particular territories of Eastern Ukraine and called to lift the EU sanctions against Russia.³⁹

German priest **Cyrill Pech**, the last president of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship, publicly justified the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014.⁴⁰

Irish former Fianna Fáil politician **Tom Kitt**, Spanish former politician from the People’s Party **Pedro Mouriño** and Italian politician from Forza Italia **Alessandro Musolino** took part in the politically biased electoral observation

35 Lorraine Millot, “Les trolls du Kremlin au service de la propagande”, *Libération*, 24 October (2014), http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2014/10/24/les-trolls-du-kremlin-au-service-de-la-propagande_1129062.

36 “French Media Obsessed With Russophobic Propaganda – Journalist”, *Sputnik*, 23 August (2015), <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201508231026084221-french-media-promotes-russophobia/>.

37 “French Authorities Denied Help to Kids Travelling to Crimea’s Artek Camp”, *Sputnik*, 27 August (2016), <https://sputniknews.com/russia/201608261044676473-france-kids-crimea/>.

38 “Cultural Exchange between Germany and Donbass”, *NRT* 24, 14 May (2016), <http://nrt24.ru/en/cultural-exchange-between-germany-and-donbass>.

39 “V Germanii proshla konferentsiya protiv rusofobii i za solidarnost’ s Donbassom”, *Tsargrad*, https://tsargrad.tv/news/v-germanii-proshla-konferencija-protiv-rusofobii-i-za-solidarnost-s-donbassom_48576.

40 “Offener Brief an Präsident Putin”, *Sputnik*, 31 March (2014), <https://de.sputniknews.com/leserbriefe/20140331268146070-Offener-Brief-an-Präsident-Putin/>.



German electoral observers from the far-right Alternative for Germany: (left to right) Dietmar Friedhoff, Markus Frohnmaier, Waldemar Herdt, Robby Schlund, Steffen Kotré.

Source: https://twitter.com/Frohnmaier_AfD/status/975343740935114752

mission at the parliamentary elections in Russia in December 2011. **Mouriño** is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled RT and observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014. **Musolino** observed the illegitimate “parliamentary elections” in the Russia-occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine in November 2014.

Italian former MEP **Fabrizio Bertot** observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014 and the illegitimate “parliamentary elections” in the Russia-occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine in November 2014. He is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website and criticised the EU sanctions against Russia.

Claudio D’Amico, **Gianmatteo Ferrari** and **Gianluca Savoini** are members of the far-right, pro-Kremlin Northern League that has been engaged in various efforts advancing the Kremlin’s foreign policy interests in Italy since 2014 and signed, in March 2017, a coordination and cooperation agreement with the Russian ruling party “United Russia”. **D’Amico**, **Ferrari** and **Savoini** are members of the Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association that promotes the Kremlin’s policies. In March 2014, **D’Amico** observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum”,



Italian observer from the far-right Northern League Gianmatteo Ferrari (right) and Vladimir Putin's Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov (left).

Source: <https://twitter.com/gmatteoferrari/status/975282155248025600>

while **Savoini** took part in the politically biased electoral monitoring mission at the Russian regional elections in September 2017. Members of the Northern League regularly visit Moscow, Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine. Italian journalist **Fabio Pasinetti** is close to the Northern League and co-authored, under the pseudonym “Fabio Sapettini”, a supportive book on the relations between the Northern League and Putin's Russia.

Italian MEP **Stefano Maullu** is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website and called for the lifting of the EU sanctions against Russia.

The leader of the Japanese far-right Issuikai group **Mitsuhiro Kimura** has been in contact with Russian ultranationalists at least since 2002. In 2010, he visited Russia-occupied regions of Georgia South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In March and August 2014, he illegally visited Russia-annexed Crimea and met

with representatives of the Russian occupying forces.⁴¹ In September that year, **Kimura** observed the illegitimate “regional elections” in Crimea.⁴²

Latvian MEPs **Miroslavs Mitrofanovs** and **Andrejs Mamikins**, as well as former MEP **Tatjana Ždanoka**, have been, for many years, involved in numerous pro-Kremlin activities in Latvia and beyond, in particular attempting to discredit Latvia for its integration policies towards the Russian-speaking minority and promoting Russian interpretations of contemporary history. **Mitrofanovs** and **Ždanoka** observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014. In January 2018, **Ždanoka** participated in the presentation of the “Yalta International Economic Forum” organised by Jaromír Kohlíček in the European Parliament.

Dušan Bajatović is general director of the Serbian state-owned natural gas provider Srbijagas and chair of the council of the Development Centre of the Russian Geographical Society in Serbia. He is a regular commentator for the Serbian edition of the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website and promotes Russian economic interests in the Balkans.

Dubravko Bojić and **Aleksandar Šešelj** are members of the far-right, pro-Kremlin Serbian Radical Party. In March 2017, **Bojić** and **Šešelj** illegally visited Russia-annexed Crimea together with some other European politicians. In May the same year, **Bojić** and **Šešelj** visited the “Donetsk People’s Republic” to express their support for its pro-Russian struggle.⁴³

Vladimir Đukanović observed the illegitimate “parliamentary elections” in the occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine in November 2014.

Ognjen Pantović and **Lazar Popović** are members of the openly pro-Russian Serbian People’s Party, the founder and leader of which, Nenad Popović, observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in 2014.

Slovak former Prime Minister **Ján Čarnogurský** is president of the Slovak-Russian Society that called upon the Slovak authorities not to support the EU

-
- 41 “Sergey Aksyonov vstretilsya s eks-prem’yerom Yaponii Yukio Khatoyama”, *Postoyannoe predstavitel’stvo Respubliki Krym pri Prezidente Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, <http://www.ppcrimea.ru/index.php/ru/news/78-sergej-aksjonov-vstretilsya-s-eks-premer-ministrom-yaponii-yukio-khatoyama>; “Pravitel’stvo Yaponii dolzhno otkazat’sya ot sanktsiy v otnoshenii Rossii – lider yaponskoy patrioticheskoy organizatsii”, *Krym-Inform*, 6 August (2014), <http://www.c-inform.info/news/id/10220>.
- 42 “Nablyudatel’ iz Yaponii schitaet vybory v Krymu otkrytymi i demokraticnymi”, *TASS*, 13 September (2015), <http://tass.ru/politika/2258176>.
- 43 “Funkcionery SRS-a u poseti Donjecku”, *RTS*, 12 May (2017), <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/1/politika/2732579/visoki-funkcioneri-srs-u-poseti-donjecku.html>.

sanctions against Russia.⁴⁴ Čarnogurský participated in several CIS-EMO's electoral observation missions and a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website.

Slovak MP **Marek Krajčí** took part in the politically biased electoral monitoring mission at the Russian regional elections in September 2017.

Swedish far-right activists **Sanna Hill** and **Vavra Suk** run the English-language anti-American, pro-Kremlin and pro-Assad website Free West Media.

Swiss attorney **Emmanuel Kilchenmann** represented the interests of nine Russian canoeists suspected to have committed anti-doping rule violations.

British MEP **Janice Atkinson** was a member of the far-right UK Independence Party that opposed the EU's decision to impose sanctions on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine.

American lawyer **G. Kline Preston IV** has been doing business in Russia for several years and developed contacts with a prominent Russian politician Alexander Torshin who has close ties to President Vladimir Putin. In 2011, **Preston** introduced Torshin to David Keene, then president of the National Rifle Association. In early 2018, Torshin came under scrutiny for illegally channelling Russian funds to the National Rifle Association attempting to influence the 2016 US presidential election.⁴⁵ **Preston** participated in the politically biased electoral observation missions at the 2011 parliamentary elections and 2017 regional elections in Russia.

Foreign electoral observation as an instrument of propaganda and disinformation

The analysis of Russian media reports on the 2018 presidential election and profiles of the foreign observers invited by the Federation Assembly suggests that they were invited to Russia for three main reasons. First, Russian media needed favourable comments from foreign observers already on the day of the election to demonstrate that the voting proceeded in a calm and orderly manner. Second, Russian media needed Kremlin-friendly foreign observers to relativise any criticism of the presidential election from other foreign observers

44 "Čarnogurský sa stal prezidentom Slovensko-ruskej spoločnosti", *Pravda*, 31 January (2015), <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/344140-carnogursky-sa-stal-prezidentom-slovensko-ruskej-spolocnosti/>.

45 Anita Wadhvani, Joel Ebert, "Nashville Lawyer Who Introduced Russian Operative to the NRA Has Ties to Blackburn", *The Tennessean*, 20 March (2018), <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2018/03/20/russia-nashville-lawyer-marsha-blackburn/431448002/>.

after the voting was over. Third, Russian media and Russian official sources sometimes used comments from “Federation Assembly observers” to disinform the Russian audience about the international perception of the electoral process in Russia.

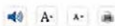
1. It has already been argued that, in the run-up to the presidential election, the Russian authorities’ only fear was a low turnout, because it could become a clear threat to the legitimacy of Putin’s predictable and unsurprising victory.⁴⁶ Thus, various Russian agencies and offices were involved in attempts to boost the turnout even on the day of the election itself, and one way to do this was to publicise, via Internet and TV reports, favourable comments on the turnout from foreign observers. However, reputable electoral monitoring organisations do not usually comment on different aspects of the electoral process before the voting is over, and, as a rule, they provide preliminary results of their observation the day after the election. It is exactly for this reason Russian media turned to “Federation Assembly observers” as they were not part of any established electoral monitoring organisation and were not limited by the common rules of electoral observation.

The analysis of the reports on the electoral process on the election day mentioning foreign monitors published by the Russian major news agency “Rossiya Segodnya” reveals that comments from “Federation Assembly observers” were disproportionately publicised in comparison to those from any other foreign observers. Out of 31 reports by “Rossiya Segodnya” mentioning foreign observers in Russia, 23 reports featured comments from non-affiliated monitors invited by the Federation Assembly, and only 8 reports featured comments from other foreign monitors. Furthermore, the analysis of those 23 reports shows that “Rossiya Segodnya” journalists asked foreign observers a standard set of 3-4 questions, one of which was about their perception of the turnout. Publicising their positive replies about the turnout on the day of the election aimed at boosting it even further.

2. There were several cases where comments from “Federation Assembly observers” were used to relativise or neutralise criticism of the electoral process. For example, when reporting on the annulment of the electoral results in seven polling stations because of various irregularities, a report by the government-founded Public Television of Russia first cited the CEC’s chairwoman Ella Pamfilova who commented on the reasons of the annulment, then Michael Georg Link who led the short-term OSCE observer mission and commented on the lack of real political competition, and finally – to relativise Links’ criticism

46 Ilya Budraitskis, “Russia’s Presidential Elections: Predictable Results with an Unpredictable Aftermath”, *OpenDemocracy Russia*, 29 January (2018), <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/ilya-budraitskis/russian-presidential-elections-2018-predictable-results>.

Наблюдатели ОБСЕ контролируют в Калуге выборы Президента РФ



18.03.2018 в 15:22, просмотров: 511



Moskovskiy Komsomolets/ misrepresenting foreign observers invited by the Federal Assembly as “OSCE observers”.

Source: <http://www.mkkaluga.ru/articles/2018/03/18/nablyudateli-obse-kontroliruyutv-kaluge-vybory-prezidenta-rf.html>

– the report quoted Qian Xiao-Yun who said that the election had been characterised by respect towards presidential candidates and that some polling stations had children’s play areas, first-aid posts and canteens, as if it had anything to do with assessing whether the election was free and/or fair.⁴⁷

Yet another example of the relativisation of any criticism of the electoral process is a report by the Vesti TV channel titled “International observers did not register major violations at the elections in the Russian Federation”. The report cited 12 foreign observers, and 10 of them were foreign monitors invited by the Federation Assembly, while only two observers represented the OSCE.⁴⁸

3. The two cases of the reports from Public Television of Russia and Vesti TV, as well as other examples, demonstrate once again that the OSCE/ODIHR electoral monitoring mission was the primary target of the “neutralising” effect of the comments by the “Federation Assembly observers”. However, some Russian media and even official bodies went even further and misrepresented non-affiliated foreign observers as OSCE monitors.

One day before the election, the Election Commission of the Moscow Region falsely claimed that Tom Kitt, Pedro Mouriño and Borja de Arístegui had come

47 “Rezul’taty vyborov annulirovany na semi uchastkakh”, *OTR*, 19 March (2018), <https://otr-online.ru/news/rezultati-viborov-annulirovani-100589.html>.

48 Aleksey Petrov, “Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli ne zafiksirovali ser’oznykh narusheniy na vyborakh v RF”, *Vesti*, 19 March (2018), <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2997166&tid=111203>.

to observe the Russian presidential election as part of the OSCE mission.⁴⁹ On the day of the election, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* misrepresented Alain Marleix, Jean Cadet, Denis Jacquat and other non-affiliated monitors as “OSCE observers”.⁵⁰ *Biyskiy rabochiy* pulled the same trick with Maurice Bonnot and Véronique Rouez.⁵¹ These cases of misrepresentation aimed at disinforming the Russian audience about the real assessment of the electoral process by the OSCE/ODIHR mission.

Surprisingly, another victim of misrepresentation and disinformation was PACE: the Interfax news agency reported that “Council of Europe” observers Sergey Lushch, Milovan Peulić and Alexandar Tikhomirov Simov commended the electoral process in the Tula region.⁵² However, the problem with misrepresenting these “Federation Assembly observers” as observers from PACE was that the Russian authorities declined to invite any PACE monitors already in January 2018 (there were no PACE observers at the Russian 2016 parliamentary elections either), because PACE had limited the scope of the Russian delegation’s participation in PACE over the annexation of Crimea in 2014.⁵³

Finally, one of the standard questions that “Rossiya Segodnya” journalists asked “Federation Assembly observers” was about comparison of the electoral process in Russia to that in Europe; in case the foreign observers replied that the electoral process in Russia was superior, “Rossiya Segodnya” published their replies to assure the Russian audience of their country’s leadership in the area of democratic development.

There might be yet another, fourth, reason for inviting those observers to Russia: the expansion of the pro-Kremlin network in the West and other parts of the world. In previous years, some foreign politicians, activists and experts who came to observe elections in Russia and the post-Soviet space as part of electoral monitoring missions organised by the Russian pro-government structures, would later be engaged in other pro-Kremlin activities. Thus, for many

49 “V Mosoblizbirkome sostoyalas’ vstrecha s predstavitel’yami Missii nablyudateley (OBSE) na vyborakh Prezidenta Rossii”, *Vestnik izbiratel’noy komissii Moskovskoy oblasti*, 17 March (2018), http://www.izbirkommo.ru/novosti/?ELEMENT_ID=86058.

50 Yevgeniya Mikhaylova, “Nablyudateli OBSE kontroliruyut v Kaluge vybory Prezidenta RF”, *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, 18 March (2018), <http://www.mkkaluga.ru/articles/2018/03/18/nablyudateli-obse-kontroliruyut-v-kaluge-vybory-prezidenta-rf.html>.

51 “Frantsuzy v gorode: v Biyske rabotayut nablyudateli OBSE”, *Biyskiy rabochiy*, 18 March (2018), <http://biwork.ru/vybory/164436-frantsuzy-v-gorode-v-biyske-rabotayut-nablyudateli-obse.html>.

52 “Nablyudateli ot Soveta Evropy ne nashli narusheniy na prezidentskikh vyborakh v Tul’skoy oblasti”, *Interfax*, 18 March (2018), <http://www.interfax-russia.ru/Center/news.asp?id=917275&sec=1671>.

53 “Rossiya ne priglasit nablyudateley PASE na prezidentskie vybory”, *NTV*, 11 January (2018), <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1970473/>.

“Federation Assembly observers”, who had not been involved in any pro-Kremlin efforts before, the mission in March 2018 may become a point of entry into a larger universe of the pro-Kremlin activities.

Conclusion

The OSCE/ODIHR deployed 481 short-term and long-term observers of the Russian presidential election, and their mission was the largest among all the other electoral monitoring missions that observed the electoral process. Considering the strong international reputation of the OSCE/ODIHR and given the authoritarian nature of the current political regime in Russia, the Russian authorities needed a convincing – for the domestic audience – counterweight to what they expected would be a lack of praise of the electoral process from the OSCE/ODIHR.⁵⁴

The Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation found such a counterweight in a mission of non-affiliated foreign electoral observers, whose overall number, 482, deliberately or accidentally almost precisely matched the number of the OSCE/ODIHR observers. These observers were officially invited by the lower and upper houses of the Federation Assembly, but several organisations, in particular, CIS-EMO, the “Civic Control” Association and the National Social Monitoring, which are not formally related to the Federal Assembly, took an active part in recruiting and coordinating foreign observers. Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky and his deputy Aleksey Chepa acted as intermediaries between the Federation Assembly and those formally non-state organisations.

Despite the assurances that the foreign observers invited by the Federation Assembly could not be “accused of political bias” (Leonid Slutsky) or that were not “some pro-Russian politicians” (Vasiliy Likhachev), there were well-grounded reasons to suspect that, in many cases, the situation was completely the opposite. The CEC’s decision not to publish names of 482 observers invited by the Federal Assembly (the CEC published names of all the other foreign observers) even a month after the election only reinforced the suspicions about

54 The Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission authored by the OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly argues: “The 18 March presidential election took place in an overly controlled legal and political environment marked by continued pressure on critical voices, while the Central Election Commission (CEC) administered the election efficiently and openly. After intense efforts to promote turnout, citizens voted in significant numbers, yet restrictions on the fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression, as well as on candidate registration, have limited the space for political engagement and resulted in a lack of genuine competition”. See OSCE/ODIHR, “Presidential Election, 18 March 2018”, OSCE, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/russia/363766>.

the instrumental nature of the observation mission organised by the Federal Assembly.

Despite the absence of the publicly available list of these “Federal Assembly observers”, we have managed to identify – using OSINT methods – 160 monitors; 125 of them observed the Russian presidential election in Russia and 35 of them observed the election in Russia-annexed Crimea. The analysis of 92 profiles of European, American and Japanese monitors who observed the election in Russia showed that at the least 68 of them had been previously involved – either personally or through their membership in certain political organisations – in different pro-Kremlin efforts, most common of which were: (1) previous participation in politically biased or illegitimate electoral observation missions organised by the Russian pro-Kremlin actors; (2) illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine; (3) public calls to lift the EU sanctions imposed on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine; (4) active engagement with the Russian state-controlled media; (5) public support for Russia’s backing of the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Apart from providing a politically motivated “counterweight” to the non-partisan and objective electoral observation of the OSCE/ODIHR, “Federal Assembly observers” were used by the Russian media for propaganda and disinformation purposes. Their comments on the turnout on the election day were used to boost the turnout even further, while some media even misrepresented “Federal Assembly observers” as OSCE/ODIHR observers to deceive the Russian audience about the real assessment of the electoral process by the OSCE/ODIHR mission and disinform the same audience about the international perception of the electoral processes in Russia.



Politically Biased International Election Observation at the 2018 Regional Elections in Russia

Report by Anton Shekhovtsov

Executive summary

The Russian organisation National Social Monitoring (NSM) coordinated by Roman Kolomoitsev invited 10 international experts to attend the regional elections in several Russian oblasts during the so-called single voting day. They were not officially accredited by Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) as election observers, but the Russian media and individual members of the CEC often referred to them as observers.

Neither the CEC nor the NSM published a full list of the invited international experts; however, using OSINT methods we have identified 9 out of 10 international experts from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Among them there were political activists and politicians (including one Member of the European Parliament), lawyers, businessmen, an academic and a former diplomat.

The majority of the invited international experts have a history of participating in various pro-Kremlin efforts such as (1) taking part in the politically biased election observation missions in Russia and Ukraine, (2) attempting to legitimise the illegitimate electoral processes in Transnistria and Crimea, (3) illegally visiting Russia-annexed Crimea and justifying the annexation of this Ukraine's republic, and (4) regularly providing pro-Kremlin comments to the Russian state-controlled media.



Pedro Mouriño, Peter W. Schulze, Alberto Bianco

Source: <http://www.shtab.opmoscow.ru>

The analysis of Russian media reports on the Russian elections on the single voting day and profiles of the international experts suggests that they were invited to Russia for two main reasons: (1) to boost the legitimacy of the elections with the Russian audience as the main addressee, and (2) to promote the allegedly positive image of Russia on the international stage.

Introduction

During the single voting day on the 9th of September 2018, Russia elected 26 regional heads, 7 members of the State Duma, members of 16 regional councils, 4 regional city mayors, and several thousands of municipal heads and council members.¹ Arguably the most important election was the election of the Moscow city mayor.

On the 17th of August 2018, chairwoman of Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) Ella Pamfilova declared that the CEC was not planning to invite international observers to monitor regional elections, adding that international

1 Aleksandra Beluza, "Galochki prileteli", *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 1 September (2018), <https://rg.ru/2018/08/29/vybory-raznogo-urovnia-projdet-9-sentiabria-v-80-regionah-rossii.html>.



Peter W. Schulze, Roman Kolomoiytsev

Source: <http://www.cikrf.ru>

observers could still monitor the by-election of members of the State Duma, while Russian observers could invite international experts who would attend the regional elections.² International experts, whose badges would feature the word “Guest”, a country of origin and their names, would not be officially accredited by the CEC as international observers.

No international observers offered their services to monitor the by-election to the State Duma, but the Russian organisation National Social Monitoring (NSM) coordinated by Roman invited 10 international experts to attend the regional elections in several Russian oblasts.

The NSM was founded in August 2017 as the “network of independent observers uniting leading social organisations”, including “For Clean Elections”, “Group 32”, “Russia Elects”, “People’s Observer”, “Open Alliance of Observers” and dozens of regional organisations.³ For the international observation of the

2 “Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli poka ne khotyat monitorit’ dovybory v Gosdumu”, *Rossia segodnya*, 17 August (2018), <https://ria.ru/politics/20180817/1526724361.html>.

3 “O proekte”, *Natsional’ny obshchestvenny monitoring*, <https://nom24.ru/about/>.

regional elections on the single voting day on the 10th of September 2017, the NSM invited 27 international experts,⁴ i.e. 17 people more than in 2018.

In summer 2018, the NSM's Kolomoiytsev tried to reach out to several individuals and invite them to attend the regional elections in September 2018. In his invitation letters, Kolomoiytsev stated that the NSM was “interested in assistance of holding free fair and transparent elections with the opportunity for international experts to attend the elections for the purpose of giving impartial assessment of the Russian elections”. As the NSM “would like to continue the development of such important values as transparency, openness and publicity”, Kolomoiytsev wondered whether his addressees could “visit Russia in September”. It is unclear how many invitations in total Kolomoiytsev sent out, but it seems viable to suggest that he wanted to invite more than 10 “international experts” to attend the regional elections.

International experts at the Russian 2018 regional elections and their established involvement in previous pro-Kremlin efforts

Neither the CEC nor the NSM has published a full list of the international experts who were present at the polling stations during the single voting day, but the analysis of Russian media reports allowed us to identify 9 out of 10 international experts, see Table 1.

Table 1. Identified international experts invited by the National Social Monitoring to observe the Russian elections during the single voting day.

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation	Russian region/ city of attendance
1	Belgium	Philippe Chansay Wilmotte	Saint Michael Archangel Collective	*unknown
2	France	Eugène Berg	*unknown	Novosibirsk and Kemerovo Oblasts
3	France	Patrick Brunot	*unknown	Vladimir Oblast
4	France	Aymeric Chauprade	MEP, Les Français Libres	Omsk Oblast
5	France	Véronique Rouez	*unknown	Vladimir Oblast

4 “Za vyborami v Rossii budut nablyudat’ 27 mezhdunarodnykh ekspertov”, *Rossia segodnya*, 8 September (2017), <https://ria.ru/politics/20170908/1502089440.html>.

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation	Russian region/ city of attendance
6	France	Jean-Michel Vernochet	*unknown	Ulyanovsk Oblast
7	Germany	Peter W. Schulze	University of Göttingen	Moscow, Moscow Oblast
8	Italy	Alberto Bianco	Deputy Mayor of Barbaresco	Moscow, Moscow Oblast
9	Spain	Pedro Mourifo	IberAtlantic Global Corporation	Moscow, Moscow Oblast

On the 7th of September 2018, several international experts met with the representatives of the NSM, the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, and the Russian Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights (also known in the Russian media as SPCh).⁵ In the beginning of the meeting, Igor Borisov, who co-chairs the election monitoring group of the SPCh and also heads the Russian Public Institute of Election Law, greeted the present international experts as “friends whom we know for a long time”.⁶ Indeed, the overwhelming majority of the international experts invited to monitor the elections in September 2018 have a record of previous involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts, including, but not limited to, (1) previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and elsewhere; (2) legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; and (3) cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.).

Belgian lawyer **Philippe Chansay Wilmotte**, a member of the far-right “Saint Michael Archangel Collective”, observed the 2007 parliamentary elections in Russia as part of the politically biased monitoring mission led Polish pro-Kremlin activist Mateusz Piskorski who was arrested by the Polish police in 2016 on suspicion of participating in the activities of the Russian civilian intelligence directed against the Republic of Poland.⁷ In 2007, **Wilmotte** also participated in the mission in Transnistria occupied by the Russian “peace-keeping” forces; the mission was organised by CIS-EMO, a Russian organisation known for its long-time involvement of coordinating politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions.⁸ In March 2018, **Wilmotte** participated in the politically

5 “Sopredsedatel’ MRG SPCh Igor Borisov vstretilsya s inostrannymi electoral’nymi ekspertami”, *SPCh*, 9 September (2018), <http://www.president-sovet.ru/presscenter/news/read/4898/>.

6 Lev Moskovkin, “Paradoks: est’ mezhdunarodnoe nablyudenie, a tseyli i zadach ne stavit ni odna organizatsiya”, *Livejournal*, 7 September (2018), <https://leo-mosk.livejournal.com/5366980.html>.

7 See more on Piskorski in Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2018), pp. 113-117.

8 See more on CIS-EMO in Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*, pp. 103-110.



Aymeric Chauprade

Source: omskportal.ru

biased election observation mission organised by the Federation Assembly to monitor the Russian presidential election.⁹

French lawyer **Patrick Brunot**, who represented Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in a libel case

against a French newspaper and has been in contact with Russian ultranationalists since the 1990s, participated in the CIS-EMO's 2007 mission in Transnistria, and illegally visited Russia-annexed Crimea in September 2017 to deliver a lecture at a university. In March 2018, **Brunot** participated in the politically biased election observation mission organised by the Federation Assembly to monitor the Russian presidential election.

Aymeric Chauprade, a former member of the French far-right National Front and current vice-president of the Eurosceptic Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group at the European parliament, had been involved in various

9 See Anton Shekhovtsov, "Politically Biased Foreign Electoral Observation at the Russian 2018 Presidential Election" (Berlin: EPDE, 2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/documents/details/politically-biased-foreign-electoral-observation-at-the-russian-2018-presidential-election-1423.html>.

pro-Kremlin efforts since at least 2013. **Chauprade** observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014 and was a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled media such as RT, Voice of Russia (discontinued at the end of 2013) and Sputnik.

Véronique Rouez took part in the CIS-EMO’s electoral monitoring mission at the Ukrainian parliamentary elections in 2012. In March 2018, **Rouez** participated in the politically biased election observation mission organised by the Federation Assembly to monitor the Russian presidential election.

Conspiracy theorist **Jean-Michel Vernochet** is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website and has supported Russia’s cooperation with Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria. In March 2018, **Vernochet** participated in the politically biased election observation mission organised by the Federation Assembly to monitor the Russian 2018 presidential election.

Professor **Peter W. Schulze** based at the University of Göttingen participated in Piskorski’s politically biased monitoring mission at the 2011 parliamentary elections in Russia. **Schulze** is also a regular commentator for RT and Sputnik.

Spanish former politician from the People’s Party **Pedro Mouriño** participated in Piskorski’s politically biased monitoring missions at the Russian 2011 parliamentary elections and Russian 2012 presidential elections, observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014, and took part in the politically biased election observation mission organised by the Federation Assembly to monitor the Russian 2018 presidential election. **Mouriño** is also a regular commentator for RT.

Going beyond electoral observation

As it is always the case with politically biased election observation missions organised by Russian pro-Kremlin organisations and/or state institutions, the international experts’ visit to Russia in September 2018 was used by the Russian authorities for political purposes and, in particular, to promote the allegedly positive image of Russia on the international stage using the invited international experts as potential agents of the Kremlin’s influence in Europe.

Reporting on the forthcoming arrival of the international experts to Russia, a member of the CEC Vasilij Likhachev, who coordinated international cooperation in the CEC, described them as “people with the great expert experience, who adhere[d] to the principles of impartiality [and] who already express[ed] their desire to go and monitor the voting processes in the regions during the

single voting day”.¹⁰ Likhachev would later reveal the political significance of their arrival to Russia. “These international experts – 10 people in total – represent the leading countries so the European Union – France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Italy”. Importantly, he also added that because they were coming from the *leading* countries of the EU, it was not possible to talk about the “alleged isolation of Russia” most likely referring to the EU’s criticism of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and sanctions imposed on Russia for that aggression.¹¹

The SPCh’s Igor Borisov also stressed the political significance of the international experts’ visit to Russia during their meeting with representatives of the CEC and other Russian state organisations on the eve of the elections. Addressing the international experts, Borisov thanked them “for the opportunity to continue a constructive dialogue between the peoples of Europe”, and added: “Although some politicians are trying to drop the ‘iron curtain’ around Russia, our peoples are always ready to lend a helping hand to each other and contribute to the development of a dialogue, mutual help and public diplomacy in the interests of democracy and rule of law”.¹² At the same meeting, the CEC’s Likhachev thanked the international experts for their “attention to the electoral process [in Russia] and assistance in forming an objective image of the Russian elections at the international level”.¹³

The analysis of the international experts’ remarks during various meetings with state officials and their comments to the Russian media shows that they – especially those who already participated in different pro-Kremlin efforts in the past – understood that the rationale behind their visit to Russia went beyond election observation activities and had political significance.

Talking to the Russian TASS news agency on the 22nd of August 2018, Pedro Mouriño said that he would go to Russia in September “to monitor the moods of the voters” adding that “voters in the [Moscow] city centre, on its outskirts and outside of it differed from each other”,¹⁴ as if these alleged emotional or

10 Mar’yam Gulalieva, “Mezhdunarodnye eksperty pribyvayut v Rossiyu dlya monitoringa vyborov, soobshchili v TsIK”, *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 4 September (2018), <https://www.pnp.ru/politics/mezhdunarodnye-eksperty-pribyvayut-v-rossiyu-dlya-monitoringa-vyborov-soobshchili-v-cik.html>.

11 “Za vyborami v rossiyskikh regionakh budut nablyudat’ desyat’ ekspertov iz ES”, *Rossiya segodnya*, 8 September (2018), <https://ria.ru/politics/20180908/1528099236.html>.

12 “Mezhdunarodnye elektoral’nye eksperty nachali monitoring gotovnosti ko dnyu golosovaniya 9 sentyabrya”, *Natsional’ny obshchestvenny monitoring*, 8 September (2018), <https://nom24.ru/info/opinion/mezhdunarodnye-eksperty-nachali-monitoring-gotovnosti-ko-dnyu-golosovaniya-9-sentyabrya/>.

13 Ibid.

14 “Mezhdunarodny ekspert Assotsiatsii NOM planiruet posetit’ izbiratel’nye uchastki 9 sentyabrya”, *Natsional’ny obshchestvenny monitoring*, 22 August (2018), <https://nom24.ru/info/opinion/mezhdunarodny-ekspert-assotsiatsii-nom-planiruet-posetit-izbiratelnye-uchastki-9-sentyabrya/>.

psychological differences had anything to do with assessing the fairness, credibility or transparency of the elections. It seems that, in his commentary, he wanted to create an impression that he was already satisfied with the forthcoming elections, as he mentioned that he had observed several Russian elections and argued that he could “with absolute certainty assert that all the previous elections had been conducted in compliance with the international standards”.¹⁵

During a meeting of the international experts with the representatives of the CEC, Federation Council and SPCh that took place on the eve of the elections, Véronique Rouez felt that she could already say that Russia had made “a major step towards increasing transparency” of the elections, while Eugène Berg highlighted “the openness of the Russian electoral system for foreign experts”.¹⁶

Some of the international experts’ comments aimed at convincing the Russian audience that Russian elections were more democratic and/or advanced than in their home countries. Aymeric Chauprade praised the Russian optical scan voting system (known in Russian language as KOIB) adding that in Russia – in comparison to France – “there [were] more guarantees for the voters that they could express their opinions and be sure that nobody would seize their votes”.¹⁷ Pedro Mouriño also commended the KOIB, as well as surveillance cameras, saying that the Russian election-related technological infrastructure was better than in Spain.¹⁸

However, the more recurring narrative was that on the importance of the international observation in improving the Russian international image. As she shared her impressions of the voting process with the Russian media on the election day, Véronique Rouez expressed her hope that even more international experts would be invited to the next Russian elections, as many would have an opportunity “to assure themselves personally of the transparency of the electoral system in Russia”.¹⁹ At the same time, Patrick Brunot presumed that people in France “knew very little about the internal politics, culture and history of Russia”, and, therefore, one of the French international experts’ aims was “to

15 Ibid.

16 “Mezhdunarodnye elektoral'nye eksperty nachali monitoring gotovnosti”.

17 “Deputat Evroparlamenta Emerik Shoprad: Na vyborakh v Omskoy oblasti soblyudeny vse demokraticheskie protsedury”, *Omskaya Guberniya*, 9 September (2018), <http://omskportal.ru/ru/government/News/2018/09/09/1536473747234.html>.

18 Damir Matyukhin, Elena Kononova, Zhanna Samardakova, “Luchshe, chem v Ispanii”. Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli otmetili vysokiy uroven' organizatsii vyborov v Rossii”, *360 TV*, 9 September (2018), <https://360tv.ru/news/vybory/Na-vysote-Mezhdunarodnye-nabljudateli-otmetili-organizatsiju-vyborov-v-rossi/>.

19 Teleradiokompaniya Guberniya 33, “2018 09 10 Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli na vladimirskikh vyborakh”, *YouTube*, 10 September (2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVCFnf3Fz2E>.



Patrick Brunot, Véronique Rouez

Source: <http://gubernator33.ru>

report to the their fellow citizens the entire gamut of the situation in Russia”.²⁰ Furthermore, at the meeting with the CEC’s secretary Maya Grishina and the CEC’s Nikolay Levichev and Vasiliy Likhachev on the 10th of September, Peter Schulze argued that “the collaborative work of Russian independent observers and international electoral experts [would] present, on the world stage, an objective assessment of the electoral procedures in Russia and help change the prejudiced attitude to the [Russian electoral] processes in the international information space”.²¹

Conclusion

Established election monitoring organisations did not send any observers to monitor the Russian regional elections held on the single voting day

- 20 “Mezhdunarodnye eksperty izuchili sistemu organizatsii i provedeniya regional’nykh vyborov na primere Vladimira i Suzdalya”, *GTRK “Vladimir”*, 10 September (2018), <http://vldtv.ru/society/95529/>.
- 21 “Mezhdunarodnye elektoral’nye eksperty peredali v TsIK Rossii zaklyuchenie po itogam nablyudeniya na vyborakh 9 sentyabrya”, *Natsional’ny obshchestvenny monitoring*, 10 September (2018), <https://nom24.ru/info/opinion/mezhdunarodnye-elektoralnye-eksperty-peredali-v-tsik-rossii-zaklyuchenie-po-itogam-nablyudeniya-na-v/>.

on the 9th of September 2018. However, the Russian National Social Monitoring organisation, apparently in agreement with the Central Election Commission (CEC) invited 10 foreign individuals to observe the elections in the capacity of international experts.

Most of the invited international experts have a record of involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts. These include, but are not limited to:

- taking part in the politically biased election observation missions at the Russian parliamentary elections (2007, 2011), Russian presidential elections (2012, 2018), Ukrainian parliamentary elections (2012).
- observing and, thus, attempting to legitimise the illegitimate electoral processes in Transnistria (2007) and Crimea (2014)
- illegally visiting Russia-annexed Crimea
- regularly providing pro-Kremlin comments to the Russian state-controlled media (RT, Voice of Russia, Sputnik)

Despite the fact that the international experts were not accredited by Russia's CEC as official election observers, Russian media, as well as individual members of the CEC, often referred to them as *observers* and stated that they had *observed* the elections. These discursive tactics were aimed at (1) boosting the legitimacy of the elections with the Russian audience as the main addressee, and (2) promoting the allegedly positive image of Russia on the international stage using the invited international experts as potential agents of the Kremlin's influence in Europe.



The Globalisation of Pro-Kremlin Networks of Politically Biased Election Observation: The Cases of Cambodia and Zimbabwe

Report by Anton Shekhovtsov

Executive summary

Due to the fact that the Cambodian authorities banned the main opposition party in 2017, Western states declined to send any observers to monitor the parliamentary elections in Cambodia held on 29 July 2018. On the contrary, for the first time since 2002, Western institutions sent several missions to monitor the elections in Zimbabwe that were held on 30 July 2018 following the coup d'état in 2017.

As the Cambodian authorities needed friendly Western voices that would approve of the parliamentary elections, Cambodia's National Election Committee accredited several minor Western missions, including a "senior delegation of the international observers" consisting of around 30 monitors and represented predominantly by European and American politicians, that were coordinated and seemingly guided by the Cambodian, pro-government Civil Society Alliance Forum.

While there was no lack of Western monitoring of the elections in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission accredited a mission of the little known and shady organisation called Association for Free Research and International



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/aariikaa/posts/10160611503200317>

Cooperation (AFRIC) that sent around 40 observers – some of them were from European countries – to monitor the Zimbabwean elections.

The “senior delegation of the international observers” (in the Cambodian case) and the AFRIC’s observation mission (in the Zimbabwean case) offered positive – and sometimes clearly politically charged – assessments of the elections in both countries, and their statements were widely disseminated by the state-controlled media to give an impression of overwhelming Western satisfaction with the conduct of the elections.

Neither the “senior delegation of the international observers”, nor the AFRIC’s mission was transparent about the principles or methodologies they employed for observing the election processes in Cambodia or Zimbabwe. They did not comply with the “Code of Conduct for International Election Observers” endorsed by all relevant international election observation organisations including ODIHR/OSCE which states that “international election observation missions must be of sufficient size to “determine independently and impartially the character of election processes in a country and must be of sufficient duration

to determine the character of all of the critical elements of the election process in the pre-election, election-day and post-election period.”

Many of the members of the “senior delegation of the international observers” in Cambodia and the AFRIC’s observation mission in Zimbabwe have a history of involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts that include, but are not limited to: (1) previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions; (2) legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine); (3) criticism of the EU European sanctions imposed on Russia; (4) cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.); and (5) disseminating pro-Kremlin narratives on social media (Facebook).

The mission of the “senior delegation of the international observers” in Cambodia was directly coordinated by several Russian actors, in particular, by Aleksey Chepa, deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, and Oleg Bondarenko, Director of the Foundation for Progressive Policy that is engaged in advancing the Kremlin’s foreign policy interests in Europe.

While there has been no evidence so far that Russian officials or experts were directly involved in coordinating the AFRIC’s mission in Zimbabwe, it is important to note that the head of the mission, Jose Matemulane, studied in several Russian universities from 2002 until 2012, disseminates pro-Kremlin propaganda on the social networks and maintains contacts with various Russian actors.

Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections: background

On 29 July 2018, Cambodia held general elections to elect 125 members of the National Assembly, the lower house of the Parliament of Cambodia. The elections took place against the background of the absence to the genuine opposition to the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) led by Prime Minister Hun Sen who had governed the country since November 1998.¹

1 See more details on the problematic nature of the Cambodian 2018 elections here: “Pre-Election Assessment Report”, *The Asian Network for Free Elections 2018 Cambodia National Assembly Elections*, <https://anfrel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-REPORT-2018-CAMBODIA-PEAM.pdf>.

Kem Sokha, the leader of the major opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) was arrested in September 2017 and charged with treason. The CNRP, which had 55 representatives in the parliament at that time, was dissolved by the ruling of the Cambodian Supreme Court in November 2017. The same ruling also banned 118 CNRP's officials from politics for five years, while all the party's members lost their seats in the National Assembly. Preceding the Court's ruling, Prime Minister Sen claimed that the CNRP was plotting a "colour revolution" in Cambodia, with the help from the USA.²

Twenty political parties ran for parliament, but in the absence of the CNRP, which had urged the voters to boycott the elections, only the CPP obtained the seats in the parliament, thus turning Cambodia in to a one-party state.

The European External Action Service stated that "the 29 July general election in Cambodia took place in a highly restrictive political climate", as "the Cambodian authorities [had] used the country's judicial system and other forms of pressure to restrict the space for political opposition, for criticism and dissent, including by civil society".³ The EU did not consider the 2018 parliamentary elections legitimate, declined to observe them and suspended its financial assistance to the Cambodian National Election Committee (NEC).

The US White House stated that the Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections "were neither free nor fair and failed to represent the will of the Cambodian people", because, in particular, "the Cambodian government [had] placed ever tighter restrictions on independent media and civil society, dissolved the main opposition party, jailed the opposition leader, and banned that party's senior leaders from participating in the political process".⁴ Like the EU, the US did not send any observers to monitor the Cambodia elections in 2018, and neither did Australia, Canada or Japan.⁵

- 2 Ben Sokhean, "Breaking: Supreme Court Rules to Dissolve CNRP", *The Phnom Penh Post*, 16 November (2017), <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/breaking-supreme-court-rules-dissolve-cnrp>.
- 3 Maria Kocijancic, "Statement by the Spokesperson on the General Elections in Cambodia", *European Union External Action*, 30 July (2018), https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/48957/Statement%20by%20the%20Spokesperson%20on%20the%20general%20elections%20in%20Cambodia.
- 4 "Statement from the Press Secretary on Cambodia's Flawed Parliamentary Elections", *The White House*, 29 July (2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-cambodias-flawed-parliamentary-elections/>.
- 5 David Boyle, "Cambodia Set to Become One-party State", *Voice of America*, 30 July (2018), <https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-set-to-become-one-party-state/4505567.html>.

International observation of the Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections

Despite the boycott of the elections on the part of several countries, the NEC accredited 220 international observers from 52 countries to monitor the parliamentary elections.⁶ International observers represented countries, institutions and organisations (see Table 1 and Table 2), but several international observers monitored the elections on their own behalf.

Table 1. National delegations providing international observation at the Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections.

Country	Name	Head of delegation
China	China NGO Network for International Exchanges	*unknown
China	International Department of Communist Party of China	Ding Xuexiang ⁷
China	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	*unknown
France	Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe	Emmanuel Dupuy
Indonesia	Muslim Intellectual Association	*unknown
Russia	Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation	Sergey Ordzhonikidze
Russia	Federation Council of the Russian Federation	Stepan Zhiryakov
Russia	State Duma of the Russian Federation	Aleksey Chepa
Maldives	Election Commission of Maldives	*unknown
Maldives	Human Rights Commission	Aminath Eenas
Nepal	Civil Society and Academia	*unknown
USA	Fund for Reconciliation and Development	John McAuliff

6 “International Observers from 52 Countries to Observe Cambodia’s General Election 2018”, *Fresh News*, 24 July (2018), <http://en.freshnewsasia.com/index.php/en/10297-2018-07-24-16-17-40.html>. One Cambodian source claimed that the NEC accredited 538 international observers from about 60 countries, see Khan Sophirom, “Four U.S Senators Arrive in Cambodia for Observation of Tomorrow’s National Election”, *Agence Kampuchea Press*, 28 July (2018), <https://web.archive.org/web/20180729111029/http://www.akp.gov.kh/archives/134354>. However, this number was not confirmed by any sources.

7 One Cambodia source mentioned “Ding Wenchao, a Director General of the Communist Party of China”, see Khan Sophirom, “Cambodian PM Receives Different Delegations of International Election Observers”, *Agence Kampuchea Press*, 28 July (2018), <https://web.archive.org/web/20180729111338/http://www.akp.gov.kh/archives/134371>. However, the name of the Director of the General Office of the Communist Party of China is Ding Xuexiang.

Table 2. International delegations providing international observation at the Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections.

Name	Head of delegation
ASEAN ⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Assembly	*unknown
Asian Parliamentary Assembly ⁹	Ali Khorram
Asian Youth Council	*unknown
Centrist Asia Pacific Democrats International	Agung Laksono
Centrist Democrat International	Andrés Pastrana Arango
Committee for ASEAN Youth Cooperation	*unknown
International Conference of Asian Political Parties	Jose de Venecia
Shanghai Cooperation Organisation	*unknown
Society International	*unknown
Volunteers Observers for the Cambodian Election	Tony Kevin

The work of the international, as well as domestic Cambodian, observers was coordinated by the Cambodia-based Civil Society Alliance Forum, which welcomed the arrest of the CNRP's Kem Sokha and, in doing so, echoed the narratives of the Cambodian authorities by officially stating that Sokha “conspired with foreign powers, using human rights as pretext to mislead Cambodian voters in order to overthrow a legitimate government elected by the people in free and fair elections”.¹⁰

Although the EU and US refused to send observers to monitor the Cambodian elections, not only did the France-based Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe and the US-based Fund for Reconciliation and Development monitor the elections, but individual international observers observed them as well. On 27 July 2018, the NEC announced that its chairman Sik Bun Hok would meet “32 observers of senior delegation of the international observers including Senators and Members of Parliament (MP) from European Community”.¹¹ The list of this “delegation”, which was leaked to the author of this report, features 31 names, i.e. one name less, see Table 3.

8 ASEAN stands for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

9 “Statement of APA on the 2018 National Election in Cambodia”, *Asian Parliamentary Assembly*, 29 July (2018), <http://www.asianparliament.org/newsgroup/news/detail/statement-of-apa-on-the-2018-national-election-in-cambodia/5953/view/>.

10 “Statement of Civil Society Alliance Forum on the Arrest of Kem Sokha”, *Swift News*, 3 September (2017), <http://swiftnewsdaily.com/archives/88039>.

11 “Media Alert: The Meeting Between H.E Mr. Sik Bun Hok and Senior Delegation of International Observers from European Community”, *National Election Committee*, 27 July (2018), <https://www.necelect.org.kh/english/content/media-alert-meeting-between-he-mr-sik-bun-hok-and-senior-delegation-international-observers>.

Table 3. The “senior delegation of the international observers”¹²

No.	Name	Country	Affiliation
1	Marat Amankulov	Kyrgyzstan	Member of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan
2	Luca Bellotti	Italy	Ex-undersecretary of state at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies
3	Fabrizio Bertot	Italy	Forward Italy
4	Oleg Bondarenko	Russia	Director, Foundation for Progressive Policy
5	Valerio Cignetti	Italy	Tricolour Flame
6	Liana Davtyan ¹³	Armenia	*unknown
7	Andrea Delmastro Delle Vedove	Italy	Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Brothers of Italy
8	Gian Luigi Ferretti	Italy	General Labour Union
9	Rodrigo Do Val Ferreira	Brazil	Landless Workers' Movement
10	Sylvie Goddyn ¹⁴	France	Member of the European Parliament, National Rally
11	Jaroslav Holík	Czech Republic	Member of the Czech Parliament, Freedom and Direct Democracy
12	Johannes Hübner	Austria	Freedom Party of Austria
13	Irina Karamushkina	Kyrgyzstan	Member of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan
14	Axel Kassegger	Austria	Member of the Austrian Parliament, Freedom Party of Austria
15	Maurizio Marrone	Italy	Member of the regional parliament of Piedmont, Brothers of Italy
16	Alessandro Musolino	Italy	Forward Italy
17	Elias Myrianthous	Cyprus	Member of the Cypriot Parliament, Movement for Social Democracy
18	Angela Myoseos Myrianthous ¹⁵	Cyprus	*unknown
19	Momchil Nekov	Bulgaria	Member of the European Parliament, Bulgarian Socialist Party
20	Kirill Prokopov	Russia	Just Russia
21	Maria Proto	Italy	*unknown
22	Zoran Radojčić	Serbia	Member of the Serbian Parliament, Dveri
23	Antonio Razzi	Italy	Forward Italy
24	Luca Romagnoli	Italy	Social Right/Brothers of Italy
25	Armen Rustamyan	Armenia	Member of the Armenian Parliament, Armenian Revolutionary Federation

12 The list is edited and modified by the author of this report to reflect correct spellings and affiliations.

13 Liana Davtyan is a spouse of Armen Rustamyan.

14 According to Alessandro Marazzi Sassoon, who wrote a report on the Cambodian elections for BBC (Alessandro Marazzi Sassoon, “The European Populists Monitoring ‘Sham’ Elections”, *BBC*, 2 August (2018).), Sylvie Goddyn’s office claimed that she had not gone to Cambodia. However, at the moment it seems impossible to verify whether she was there or not.

15 Angela Myoseos Myrianthous is a spouse of Elias Myrianthous.

No.	Name	Country	Affiliation
26	Alexandar Seselj	Serbia	Member of the Serbian Parliament, Serbian Radical Party
27	Aleksei Tikhomirov	Russia	Just Russia
28	Bogdan Țirdea	Moldova	Member of the Moldovan Parliament, Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
29	Mariya Vasilyeva	Russia	*unknown
30	Richard Wood	UK	United Kingdom Independence Party
31	Vasiliy Zadnepryany	Belarus	Chairman, Republican Party of Labour and Justice

Apart from these “senior international observers”, several other international actors from the EU and US observed the Cambodian elections at their own discretion, see Table 4.

Table 4. Other identified observers from the EU and US at the Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections.

No.	Name	Country	Affiliation
1	Douglas Ericksen	USA	Member of the Washington State Senate, Republican Party
2	Anton Caragea	Romania	*unknown
3	Vincent Buys	USA	Member of the Washington House of Representatives, Republican Party

One Cambodian source claimed¹⁶ that Ericksen headed a delegation of four members of the US Republican Party that arrived in Cambodia to observe the parliamentary elections: Ericksen, Buys, Drew MacEwen and Brandon Vick. However, after the four delegates met with the US Ambassador to Cambodia who voiced the official US concerns about the nature of the elections, MacEwen and Vick declined to observe the elections, while Ericksen and Buys continued their mission.¹⁷

16 Sophirom, “Four U.S Senators Arrive in Cambodia”.

17 Joseph O’Sullivan, “Questions Raised over Washington State Lawmakers’ Visit to Cambodia to Observe Elections”, *The Seattle Times*, 4 August (2018), <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/questions-raised-over-washington-state-lawmakers-visit-to-cambodia-to-observe-elections/>.

Assessments of the Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections by Western international observers

On 26 July 2018, the NEC released a statement that, in particular, promised: “National and international observers, associations and organizations are the witnesses of the free and fair election”.¹⁸ Indeed, most of the responses to the parliamentary elections by Western (European and American) observers were positive.

Andrés Pastrana Arango, chairman of the Centrist Democrat International affiliated with the European People’s Party and National Democratic Institute, said that he believed that the elections could be considered “legitimate”.¹⁹ US Senator **Douglas Ericksen** described the Cambodian parliamentary elections as “amazingly transparent” and “incredibly well conducted”.²⁰ **Andrea Delmas-tro**, an Italian MP representing the far-right Brothers of Italy party, said that he found “no anomalies [...] in the voting procedures”.²¹ According to **Fabrizio Bertot**, a member of the Italian centre-right “Forward Italy” party and a former MEP, “the elections took place in a peaceful and joyful atmosphere”.²² The impression of **Axel Kassegger**, an Austrian MP from the far-right Freedom Party of Austria, was that “the election process [was] very professional, smooth and calm. Everything [was] looking okay in my opinion”.²³ **Jaroslav Holík**, a Czech MP from the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party stated that the 2018 parliamentary elections were “very well organized”.²⁴ **Momchil Nekov**, a Bulgarian MEP from the Bulgarian Socialist Party, claimed that “the counting process was transparent in response to the wishes of the Cambodian people. The great number of voters, more than 80%, legitimatises the democratic election of

18 “Press Release: Around 80,000 National and International Observers Are Accredited by NEC”, *National Election Commission*, 26 July (2018), <https://www.necselect.org.kh/english/content/press-release-around-80000-national-and-international-observers-are-accredited-nec>.

19 “Millions of Cambodians Vote in Elections without Main Opposition Party”, *Agencia EFE*, 29 July (2018), <https://www.efe.com/efe/english/portada/millions-of-cambodians-vote-in-elections-without-main-opposition-party/50000260-3705070>.

20 “State Sen. Doug Ericksen out of Order to Approve of a Sham Foreign Election”, *The Seattle Times*, 23 September (2018), <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/editorials/lawmaker-out-of-order-to-approve-of-a-sham-foreign-election/>.

21 “Ronald Reagan Institute of Political Studies and Integration: Observer Delegations Evaluate the Cambodian Elections”, *PR Newswire*, 2 August (2018), <http://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/ronald-reagan-institute-of-political-studies-and-integration-observer-delegations-evaluate-the-689841461.html>.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*



Anton Caragea, Hun Sen.

Source: <http://en.freshnewsasia.com/index.php/en/10409-2018-07-30-06-43-26.html>

the 6th legislature”.²⁵ **Alessandro Musolino**, a member of the “Forward Italy” party “expressed his satisfaction with the organization and the open participation in the elections as a symbol of transparency”.²⁶ A Romanian individual **Anton Caragea**, who runs a website called “European Council on Tourism and Trade”, gives himself sham “OSCE awards”²⁷ and refers to himself as “President Professor Dr. Anton Caragea”, declared – on behalf of the non-existent “International Election Monitoring Team” – that the parliamentary elections were “free and fair”.²⁸ The same conclusion was voiced by **Richard Wood**, a member of the British far-right UKIP.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “European Council on Tourism and Trade”, <https://ectt.webs.com/>.

²⁸ Anton Caragea, “President Professor Dr. Anton Caragea Gives Full Legitimacy to Cambodia Parliamentary Elections 2018”, *Anton Caragea*, 30 August (2018), <https://antoncaragea.wordpress.com/2018/08/30/president-professor-dr-anton-caragea-gives-full-legitimacy-to-cambodia-parliamentary-elections-2018/>.

²⁹ Sassoon, “The European Populists”.

Asked whether they thought that the absence of the CNRP in the electoral process was problematic, many Western observers dismissed the concern. For example, **Antonio Razzi**, a member of the “Forward Italy” party, “brushed off the opposition’s dissolution as ‘an internal affair in which we do not meddle’”. **Maurizio Marrone**, a member of the Italian far-right Brothers of Italy party and member of the regional parliament of Piedmont, said that the elections were guided by “the rules and rights equal for all the parties and ensured by law”.³⁰ UKIP’s **Richard Wood** said he was not interested in the CNRP at all: “The opposition, I know nothing about it, my only job was to come here, see the election and report on the process, and that’s what I’ve done”.³¹

Perhaps not surprisingly, some Western observers echoed the Cambodian authorities’ propaganda narrative about the threats of “foreign interference” and a “colour revolution” in the country. **Andrea Delmastro** stated that “Cambodia [had] conducted its elections without international interference”, while **Fabrizio Bertot** tweeted that “the controversies surrounding elections concern[ed] international interests and interference of countries and funding from NGOs”.³² **Maurizio Marrone** said that the elections in Cambodia were successful “despite attempts of coloured revolutions by western lobbies, as already seen in Ukraine with a coup d’état”.³³

Some observers made little secret of their political agenda. For instance, **Bogdan Țirdea**, a Moldovan MP representing the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, commenting on the international observation mission in Cambodia said: “We are pro-Russia, anti-globalisation and anti-Americanisation. [...] The world is divided between traditionalists and globalist liberalists. [...] “I don’t believe in free elections”.³⁴

Neither the “senior delegation of the international observers”, nor any other Western election observation mission, apart from the Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe, published a report after their observation or presented principles or methodologies that were supposed to guide their monitoring missions. They did not comply with the “Code of Conduct for International Election Observers” endorsed by all relevant international election observation organisations including ODIHR/OSCE, OSCE PA, PACE, European Parliament and others, which states that “international election observation missions must be of sufficient size to “determine independently and impartially the character

30 “Ronald Reagan Institute of Political Studies and Integration”.

31 Sassoon, “The European Populists”.

32 Fabrizio Bertot, “#CambodiaElection2018 Take Place...”, *Twitter*, 30 July (2018), <https://twitter.com/BertotFabrizio/status/1023864034767069184>.

33 “Ronald Reagan Institute of Political Studies and Integration”.

34 Sassoon, “The European Populists”.

of election processes in a country and must be of sufficient duration to determine the character of all of the critical elements of the election process in the pre-election, election-day and post-election period.”³⁵

The “senior delegation of the international observers” and the Russian connection

Direct and indirect evidence suggests that Russian officials played a very important role in providing the Cambodian authorities not only with Russian, but also with European, observers.

Russia held the most recent presidential election on 18 March 2018. Out of 1513 international monitors who observed the presidential election, two represented the Cambodian NEC: Dim Sovannarom and Som Sorida. A day before the election, chairwoman of the Russian Central Election Commission (CEC) Ella Pamfilova signed an agreement with Sovannarom as the NEC’s representative. The agreement implied that the parties would “exchange information on international electoral standards, their application in national laws on elections and practical work of election authorities”. The agreement also provided for “organising and holding seminars, research-to-practice conferences, roundtables, [and] other events on the subjects of mutual interest”.³⁶ One of the themes of cooperation between the Russian CEC and Cambodian NEC might have been politically biased international election observation.

Aleksey Chepa, deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, who led the delegation of the State Duma to observe the Cambodian parliamentary elections, was also one of the coordinators of the group of 482 politically biased international observers at the Russian presidential election.³⁷ Chepa is also a member of the “Just Russia” party, and two members of this party, namely Kirill Prokopov and Aleksei Tikhomirov, were described – in the Cambodian list of the “senior delegation of the international observers” (see Table 3) – as “group coordinators”, and one can surmise that they acted on behalf

35 See *The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/16935>.

36 “TsIK Rossii zaklyuchila soglashenie s izbiratel’noy komissiyey Kambodzhi”, *Tsentral’naya izbiratel’naya komissiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, 18 March (2018), <http://www.cikrf.ru/news/cec/39375/>.

37 Anton Shekhovtsov, “Politically Biased Foreign Electoral Observation at the Russian 2018 Presidential Election”, *European Platform for Democratic Elections*, 16 April (2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/documents/details/politically-biased-foreign-electoral-observation-at-the-russian-2018-presidential-election-1423.html>.

of Chepa. Moreover, the “Just Russia” party revealed that its membership in the Socialist International, an international association of socialist and social-democratic parties, allowed it to invite politicians from Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Serbia to observe the Cambodian parliamentary elections,³⁸ and, indeed, representatives from these countries – and predominantly members of socialist/social-democratic parties – are included in the Cambodian list of the “senior delegation of the international observers”.

Furthermore, yet another Russian individual from the above-mentioned list, Oleg Bondarenko, was mentioned by an Italian observer Fabrizio Bertot who said that Bondarenko “had co-ordinated the invitations for European observers sent out by the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs”.³⁹

Oleg Bondarenko, Director of the Russia-based Foundation for Progressive Policy, is known for advancing Moscow’s foreign policy interests in Europe. In 2006-2014, he was an executive director of the Ukraine-based Russian-Ukrainian Information Centre that was founded by Russian far-right politician Dmitry Rogozin and spread Kremlin propaganda in Ukraine. In 2008, upon the invitation from the far-right Serbian Radical Party, Bondarenko organised the first Russian-Serbian Business Forum in Belgrade as an instrument of furthering Russian influence in Serbia. In 2017, he observed the German parliamentary elections, implicitly supporting two German parties, namely The Left (Die Linke) and Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland), that are friendly towards Moscow.⁴⁰ In January, as he was travelling to Germany to take part in a political event organised by The Left party, Bondarenko was denied entry to the Schengen area at Poland’s request.⁴¹

Several individuals from the Cambodia list of the “senior delegation of the international observers” have been previously involved in various pro-Kremlin efforts that include, but are not limited to:

- previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and Ukraine;
- legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial

38 “Aleksey Chepa: Rossiya namerena razvivat’ otnosheniya s Kambodzhey”, *Spravedlivaya Rossiya*, 31 July (2018), <http://www.spravedlivo.ru/9060510>.

39 Sassoon, “The European Populists”.

40 “Prognose von Politikanalyst Oleg Bondarenko: Im Bundestag wird es ein prorussisches Drittel geben”, *RT*, 22 September (2017), <https://deutsch.rt.com/meinung/57687-prognose-von-oleg-bondarenko-im/>.

41 “Rossiyskomu politologu zapretili v’yezd v ES po trebovaniyu Pol’shi”, *TASS*, 14 January (2018), <https://tass.ru/politika/4872891>.



Gian Luigi Ferretti, Richard Wood, Alexandar Seselj, Antonio Razzi

<http://en.freshnewsasia.com/index.php/en/10421-2018-07-30-10-08-52.html>

integrity (illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine);

- criticism of the EU European sanctions imposed on Russia;
- cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.).

In March 2017, Kyrgyz MPs from the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, **Marat Amankulov** and **Irina Karamushkina**, Brazilian politician **Rodrigo Do Val Ferreira**, Czech far-right MP **Jaroslav Holík**, Serbian far-right MP **Alexandar Seselj** and British far-right politician **Richard Wood** illegally visited Russia-annexed Crimea to render legitimacy to the Russian invasion of this Ukrainian territory. In May 2017, Šešelj illegally visited the “Donetsk People’s Republic” to express his support for its pro-Russian struggle.

Italian former MEP **Fabrizio Bertot** observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014 and the illegitimate “parliamentary elections” in the Russia-occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine in November 2014. He was also part of the politically biased international monitoring missions at the Russian regional elections in September 2014 and at the Russian presidential election in

March 2018.⁴² Bertot is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website and criticised the EU sanctions against Russia.

Valerio Cignetti, a member of the Italian far-right Tricolour Flame and secretary general of the now defunct European far-right Alliance of European National Movements, observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014 and was part of the politically biased international monitoring mission at the Ukrainian 2012 parliamentary election.

Italian far-right activist **Gian Luigi Ferretti** observed the Russian 2018 presidential election as a member of the political biased international monitoring mission.

Austrian far-right politician **Johannes Hübner** observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014 and took part in the Russian propaganda event titled “Yalta International Economic Forum” held in Russia-annexed Crimea in 2017. **Hübner**’s fellow party member, MP **Axel Kassegger**, participated in the “Yalta International Economic Forum” in April 2016. Both **Hübner** and **Kassegger** are members of the far-right Freedom Party of Austria that has been involved in various pro-Kremlin activities since at least 2008,⁴³ and signed, in December 2016, a coordination and cooperation agreement with the Russian ruling party “United Russia”.

Italian far-right member of the regional parliament of Piedmont **Maurizio Marrone** illegally visited, in September 2016, Russia-occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine (“Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic”) to express his support for their pro-Russian struggle. In December 2016, **Marrone** launched a “representational office of the Donetsk People’s Republic” in Turin.

An Italian centre-right politician **Alessandro Musolino** observed the Russian 2011 parliamentary elections, Russian 2012 presidential election, Ukrainian 2012 parliamentary elections, illegitimate 2014 “parliamentary elections” in the Russia-occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine, and Russian 2018 presidential election. **Musolino** also took part in the conference “Donbass: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” that was held in Russia-occupied Donetsk in May 2015.

Serbian far-right MP **Zoran Radojičić** observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014.

42 Shekhovtsov, “Politically Biased Foreign Electoral Observation”.

43 See Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Eva Zelechowski, Michel Reimon, *Putins rechte Freunde: wie Europas Populisten ihre Nationen* (Vienna: Falter Verlag, 2017).

Zimbabwean 2018 elections: background

On 30 July 2018, Zimbabwe held general elections to elect the president and members of both houses of parliament. The elections were held for the first time since the coup d'état in November 2017 that ousted President Robert Mugabe who led the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and headed the country for 30 years. After Mugabe's removal from power, the country was led by Emmerson Mnangagwa, the new leader of the ZANU-PF.

Under Mnangagwa's rule, Zimbabwe decided – most likely to enhance the legitimacy of the elections – to end the ban on Western observation of Zimbabwean elections introduced by Mugabe in 2002 as he believed that Western observers favoured the opposition to Mugabe. In April 2018, Zimbabwe's Ministry for Foreign Affairs declared that it would invite international observers from the European Union, Commonwealth of Nations, United States, and Australia among other countries.⁴⁴

Almost 50 parties and coalitions of parties contested the elections to the House of Assembly, the lower chamber of the Parliament of Zimbabwe, which consists of 270 seats. The ZANU-PF won the elections having obtained 52.35% of the vote; its nearest competitor, the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance, received 34.33% of the vote. Two small parties received one seat each, and one independent candidate also secured one seat. Twenty-three candidates ran for president; the ZANU-PF's Emmerson Mnangagwa won the election with 50.8% of the vote, while Nelson Chamisa of the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance obtained 44.3% of the vote.

International observation of the Zimbabwean 2018 elections

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) accredited several international organisations to observe the 2018 elections in the country, see Table 5.

44 MacDonald Dzirutwe, "Zimbabwe Invites West to Observe Vote for First Time since 2002", *Reuters*, 10 April (2018), <https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN1HH1A9-OZATP>.

Table 5. International delegations providing international observation at the Zimbabwean 2018 elections.

Name	Head of delegation
African Union	Hailemariam Dessalegn Boshe
Association for Free Research and International Cooperation	Jose Matemulane
Carter Centre	Masa Janjusevic
Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa	Ashraf Gamal Rashed
Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC ⁴⁵ countries	Semistocles Kaijage
European Union	Elmar Brok
IRI-NDI joint election observation mission	*unknown
SADC Parliamentary Forum	Patrick Matibini
Southern African Development Community (SADC)	Tete Antonio
The Commonwealth	John Dramani Mahama

In its preliminary statement, the EU Election Observation Mission concluded that “the elections were competitive, the campaign was largely peaceful and, overall, political freedoms during the campaign, including freedom of movement, assembly and speech, were respected”. At the same time, the EU noted that “the misuse of state resources, instances of coercion and intimidation, partisan behaviour by traditional leaders and overt bias in state media, all in favour of the ruling party, meant that a truly level playing field was not yet achieved, which negatively impacted on the democratic character of the electoral environment”.⁴⁶

The joint election observation mission formed by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) stated that “Zimbabwe [had] not yet demonstrated that it [had] established a tolerant, democratic culture that enable[d] the conduct of elections in which parties [were] treated equitably and citizens [could] cast their vote freely”.⁴⁷

Non-Western election observation missions, however, were much less critical. For example, the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries “congratulated Zimbabwe and its various political parties on the manner in which they conducted themselves during the 2018 electoral period”, while the head of the

45 SADC stands for Southern African Development Community.

46 “Preliminary Statement”, *European Union Election Observation Mission*, 1 August (2018), https://cdn3-eas.fpfis.tech.ec.europa.eu/cdn/farfuture/klv-gpv2wEwF18kSrJmmoREr4XmRSK0JNGDCBCWkclk/mtime:1533137724/sites/eeas/files/010818ps_-_eu_eom_zimbabwe.pdf.

47 “Joint IRI/NDI Zimbabwe Election Observation Mission Statement on the Constitutional Court Decision”, *National Democratic Institute*, 25 August (2018), <https://www.ndi.org/publications/joint-irindi-zimbabwe-election-observation-mission-statement-constitutional-court>.

mission, Semistocles Kaijage, said that “a spirit of tolerance and restraint [had been] prevalent during the campaign period”.⁴⁸

One of the international election observation missions that provided a positive assessment of the Zimbabwean 2018 elections was the Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC) coordinated by Jose Matemulane. Already two days before the voting day, Matemulane declared that President Mnangagwa “was sticking to his promises of a free, fair and credible election”.⁴⁹ Although he said that the mission of the AFRIC was to “balance the informational space bringing impartial and reliable opinions free of speculations and attempts to delegitimise the election process”, Matemulane also made it clear that the AFRIC’s mission was hardly unbiased, as he stressed that the AFRIC’s presence in Zimbabwe aimed “to fulfil the goals of acting as the real embassy of transparency and legitimacy of the upcoming election process”.⁵⁰ Moreover, on the eve of the elections, he made evidently political comments – as if anticipating a more critical assessments of the elections on the part of the Western election observation missions – stating: “We fully share and strongly embrace the belief that African problems require African solutions on the contrary to ‘Euro or Amero-Africanised’ solutions which are brought and implemented by Western States financing organisations and are used to get incredible profits for themselves”.⁵¹

Assessments of the Zimbabwean 2018 parliamentary elections by the AFRIC

The AFRIC claims that, to observe the elections in Zimbabwe, it dispatched 43 observers from across the world, namely from countries such as Cape Verde, Germany, Mongolia, Mozambique, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine.⁵² The AFRIC did not publish the full list of its observers and also did not respond to the request of the author of this report to provide such a list. Nevertheless, we have identified 17 observers of the AFRIC observation mission that monitored the Zimbabwean elections, see Table 6. According to its website, the AFRIC’s observers arrived in Zimbabwe “several

48 “ECF-SADC Hails Zim Elections”, *The Herald*, 2 August (2018), <https://www.herald.co.zw/ecf-sadc-hails-zim-elections/>.

49 “ED walks the talk – AFRIC”, *The Chronicle*, 28 July (2018), <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/ed-walks-the-talk-afric/>.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

days prior to the election”;⁵³ at least three of AFRIC’s observers checked-in from non-Zimbabwean airports on Facebook on 26 July,⁵⁴ so they could not have arrived in Harare more than five days before the voting day.

Table 6. Identified members of the AFRIC election observation mission at the Zimbabwean 2018 elections.

No.	Name	Country	Affiliation
1	Purnima Anand	India	BRICS International Forum
2	Sphiwe Dlamini	South Africa	*unknown
3	Luciano Simao Gule	*unknown	Osaka School of International Public Policy
4	Sanna Hill	Sweden	<i>Free West Media</i> website
5	Jose Matemulane	Mozambique	Mozambique Pedagogical University
6	Ernest Mchunu	South Africa	*unknown
7	Bandile Felicity Mdlalose	South Africa	*unknown
8	Pearl Nicodemus	South Africa	*unknown
9	João Nhampossa	Mozambique	*unknown
10	Yanina Noel	Belarus	EGO Creative Innovations
11	Rishabh Sethi	India	BRICS International Forum
12	Vávra Suk	Sweden	<i>Nya Tider</i> magazine, <i>Free West Media</i> website
13	Dragana Trifković	Serbia	Center for Geostrategic Studie
14	Volker Tschapke	Germany	Prussian Society
15	Ariidipurev Tsevelragchaa	Mongolia	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
16	Fedor Turygin	Russia	*unknown
17	Mirjam Katharina Zwingli	Switzerland	Philipps-Universität Marburg

The AFRIC describes itself as “a community of independent researchers, experts and activists”, and its declared goals are: “creating a platform for elaboration and dissemination of objective analytical information, first-hand opinions” and “establishing direct communication and cooperation”.⁵⁵ It is also a shady organisation: it is impossible to establish who founded it and when. The AFRIC’s website was registered on 13 April 2018,⁵⁶ but it is unclear where the website is hosted or who registered it, because it is protected by Cloudflare Inc., a US company that proxies its traffic and makes it impossible to determine the real

53 “AFRIC Election Observer Team Jets in”, *Association for Free Research and International Cooperation*, <https://afric.online/projects/afric-election-observer-team-jets-in/>.

54 See, for example: <https://www.facebook.com/TrifkovicDragana/posts/10217591493247005>; <https://www.facebook.com/aariikaa/posts/10160582603360317>; <https://www.facebook.com/purnimaanearth/posts/10214868972629801>.

55 “About AFRIC”, *Association for Free Research and International Cooperation*, <https://afric.online/about/>.

56 “Whois Record for AFric.online”, *DomainTools*, <http://whois.domaintools.com/afric.online>.

location of the webhosting company. No contact details can be found on the AFRIC's website.

The first article on the AFRIC's website, which is run in English and French, was published in May 2018, while the AFRIC's Facebook page became active just three days before the Zimbabwean elections. The earliest reference to the AFRIC that could be found on the LinkedIn website, a business and employment-oriented service, appears in the profile of presumably Russian-born Catherine Terekhova who claims to have been working at the AFRIC as an Economic Analyst since January 2018.⁵⁷

Predictably, the question about the financing of the AFRIC is no less clear: it claims that the website "is supported by anonymous donations and it allows researchers to make publications, conduct research and receive remuneration for interesting materials".⁵⁸ Furthermore, "using cryptocurrencies, AFRIC demonstrates its independence from outdated financial and banking systems, it shows the real freedom of opinions and analysis on the internet".⁵⁹

Following Matemulane, other members of the AFRIC observation mission praised the Zimbabwean elections. **Mirjam Katharina Zwingli**, a Swiss PhD student at the Philipps-Universität Marburg, "was positively impressed by the organisation [of] the presidential election".⁶⁰ In her opinion, the elections were "a symbolic gesture that Zimbabwe ha[d] now come to international standards in terms of holding democratic processes".⁶¹ Indian observer **Rishabh Sethi** thanked the ZEC "for conducting elections in a very successful manner".⁶² In her article for the AFRIC's website, Belarusian observer **Yanina Noel** wrote that the elections had been organised "in the best way possible to ensure compliance with Zimbabwean legislation [and] providing opportunity for the people to cast their vote".⁶³ In its joint statements, the AFRIC observation mission stated that they had "noticed no signs of electoral fraud, voter intimidation or external interference in the process",⁶⁴ and that the elections had "met international standards for fair, equitable and transparent elections".⁶⁵ Expectedly, comments

57 "Catherine Terekhova", *LinkedIn*, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/catherineterekhova/>.

58 "About AFRIC".

59 *Ibid.*

60 "Observer Teams Give Polls Thumbs up", *The Herald*, 1 August (2018), <https://www.herald.co.zw/observer-teams-give-polls-thumbs-up/>.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.*

63 "AFRIC Observation Experience: Bulawayo, Harmonized Elections 2018", *Association for Free Research and International Cooperation*, <https://afric.online/532-afric-observation-experience-bulawayo-harmonized-elections-2018/>.

64 "AFRIC Observers Mission Statement", *Association for Free Research and International Cooperation*, <https://afric.online/607-afric-observers-mission-statement/>.

65 "AFRIC Election Observer Team Jets in".

from the AFRIC election observation mission were actively disseminated by the state-owned, pro-Mnangagwa media such as *The Herald* or *The Chronicle*.

However, in its short reports published after the voting day, the AFRIC's mission did not present any principles or observation methodologies they might have employed during their monitoring of the Zimbabwean elections.

The AFRIC election observation mission and the Russian connection

While there has been no evidence so far that any Russian officials played a role in coordinating the AFRIC's election observation mission at the Zimbabwean 2018 elections, the analysis of the activities of the identified members of the AFRIC's mission shows that some of them have been previously involved in pro-Kremlin efforts that include, but not are limited to:

- previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions;
- legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine);
- cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.).
- disseminating pro-Kremlin narratives on social media (Facebook).

The head of the AFRIC's mission **Jose Matemulane**, who is Assistant Professor at the Mozambique Pedagogical University in Quelimane, had studied in four Russian universities from 2002 until 2012 and received his doctoral degree from the Saint Petersburg State University.⁶⁶ On his Facebook page, he often posts messages praising Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Defence Ministry.⁶⁷

The founder of the far-right Germany-based "Prussian Society" **Volker Tschapke**, who is known for his anti-American and pro-Russian statements,⁶⁸ observed the Russian 2018 presidential election as a member of the political biased international monitoring mission. **Arildiipurev Tsevelragchaa**, Director of Foreign Cooperation at Mongolian Ministry of Labour and Social Protection,

66 "Jose Matemulane", *LinkedIn*, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jose-matemulane-90002623/>.

67 "Jose Matemulane", *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/jose.matemulane>.

68 Til Biermann, "Das skurrile Spiel der 'Preußischen Gesellschaft'", *BZ*, 22 January (2015), <https://www.bz-berlin.de/berlin/mitte/das-skurrile-spiel-der-preussischen-gesellschaft>.



Volker Tschapke, Arildiipurev Tsevelragchaa.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/aariikaa/posts/10160584521335317>

took part in the same mission, as did Swedish far-right activists **Sanna Hill** and **Vávra Suk**, who run the English-language anti-American, pro-Kremlin and pro-Assad website *Free West Media*.

Serbian observer **Dragana Trifković** is the head of the Belgrade Centre of Strategic Research and a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled media. She was one of the observers of the so-called parliamentary elections in the Russia-occupied “Donetsk People’s Republic” in November 2014. In October 2015, she illegally visited Crimea as part of a delegation from Serbia that included politicians from the ultranationalist Serbian Movement Dveri and national-conservative Democratic Party of Serbia. In March 2018, **Trifković** was part of the illegitimate observation mission that monitored the Russian presidential election in Russia-annexed Crimea.⁶⁹

69 Anton Shekhovtsov, “Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate Presidential Election in Crimea in March 2018”, *European Platform for Democratic Elections*, 3 April (2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/foreign-observation-of-the-illegitimate-presidential-election-in-crimea-in-march-2018-1375.html>.

Mirjam Katharina Zwingli regularly conveys pro-Kremlin messages on her Facebook, and took part, in December 2017, in the Eleventh European Russian Forum that hosted predominantly pro-Kremlin activists and politicians such as Giulietto Chiesa (Italy), Tatjana Ždanoka (Latvia), Bogdan Țirdea (Moldova), Dimitri de Kochko (France), and Janusz Niedźwiecki (Poland) among others.

Two Indian observers, namely **Purnima Anand** and **Rishabh Sethi**, have direct connections to the BRICS, the association of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.⁷⁰ **Anand** is President of the BRICS International Forum (as well as President of the International Federation of Indo Russian Youth Clubs), while **Sethi** is Director of International Projects at the same Forum. In March 2018, **Anand** observed the Russian presidential election as a member of the political biased international monitoring mission. Interestingly, right after observing the Zimbabwean elections, South African observer **Sphiwe Dlamini** was awarded a scholarship to attend the BRICS International school that was organised by the National Russian Committee on BRICS Research and the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, and held in Moscow at the end of August 2018.⁷¹

Conclusion

Western societies differed in their approaches to the elections that were held in Cambodia and Zimbabwe at the end of July 2018. The EU, US, Australia and Canada decided not to send any observers to Cambodia because the Cambodian authorities banned the main opposition party and, thus, Western countries considered the parliamentary elections illegitimate. The approach to the elections in Zimbabwe was the opposite: Zimbabwe lifted the ban on Western election observation introduced in 2002, and Western countries were eager to monitor the elections and to see how the country managed the democratic processes after the coup d'état in 2017.

Since the established Western election observation missions declined to send observers to monitor the elections in Cambodia, while the state authorities still needed friendly Western voices who would positively assess the conduct of the parliamentary elections, Cambodia's National Election Committee accredited several minor Western missions that were coordinated and seemingly guided by the Cambodian, pro-government Civil Society Alliance Forum. These missions included the Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe, Fund

70 Lakhyajit Taid, "Youth in BRICS' Photo Exhibition Visited by Deputy Chairperson of Russian Union of Youth", *BRICS International Forum*, <http://www.bricsforum.in/youthinbrics-ruy-visit/>.

71 "Sphiwe Dlamini", *Supreme Girls*, <http://supremegirls.co.za/sphiwe-dlamini/>.

for Reconciliation and Development, Centrist Democrat International and Volunteers Observers for the Cambodian Election, as well as around 30 observers collectively called the “senior delegation of the international observers”, the majority of the members of which came from Western nations.

While there was no lack of Western monitoring of the elections in Zimbabwe – those were observed by the EU, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute and Carter Centre, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) also accredited a mission of the little known and shady organisation called Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC) that sent around 40 observers – some of them were from European countries – to monitor the Zimbabwean elections.

The “senior delegation of the international observers” (in the Cambodian case) and the AFRIC’s observation mission (in the Zimbabwean case) offered positive – and sometimes clearly politically charged – assessments of the elections in both countries, and their statements were widely disseminated by the state-controlled media to give an impression of overwhelming Western satisfaction with the conduct of the elections.

The analysis of the composition of the “senior delegation of the international observers” in Cambodia and the AFRIC’s observation mission in Zimbabwe shows that many of their members have a history of involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts that include, but are not limited to:

- previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions;
- legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine);
- criticism of the EU European sanctions imposed on Russia;
- cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.);
- disseminating pro-Kremlin narratives on social media (Facebook).

The mission of the “senior delegation of the international observers” in Cambodia was directly coordinated by several Russian actors, in particular, by Aleksey Chepa, deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, and Oleg Bondarenko, Director of the Foundation for Progressive Policy that is engaged in advancing the Kremlin’s foreign policy interests in Europe.

While there has been no evidence so far that Russian officials or experts were directly involved in coordinating the AFRIC’s mission in Zimbabwe, it is important

to note that the head of the mission, Jose Matemulane, studied in several Russian universities from 2002 until 2012, disseminates pro-Kremlin propaganda on the social networks and maintains contacts with various Russian actors.



Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate “General Elections” in the Donetsk People’s Republic and Lugansk People’s Republic in November 2018

Report by Anton Shekhovtsov

Executive summary

As the holding of “general elections” in the internationally non-recognised Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR) ran counter to the Minsk agreements, the international community considered them as illegitimate and did not send any observers to monitor them.

Aiming to fill the void of legitimacy, the “authorities” of the DPR and LPR claimed to have invited 48 and 45 “international observers” respectively from Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Kongo, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Syria, Turkey, USA and Yemen, as well as from “Abkhazia”, “Palestine” and “South Ossetia”.

We have identified 39 “observers” in the case of the DPR and 43 – in the case of the LPR. Out of the identified individuals, around half of them were politicians and state officials. Other “observers” were predominantly businessmen, students, journalists, and far-right and far-left activists and conspiracy theorists.



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/alexistarrade.AT/posts/2144068252324053>

None of the observers were transparent about the methodology they employed for observing the election processes and, therefore, did not comply with the “Code of Conduct for International Election Observers” endorsed by all relevant international election observation organisations, including ODIHR/OSCE.

The overwhelming majority of non-Russian “international observers” have already been involved in various pro-Kremlin efforts that include, but are not limited to: (1) previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and elsewhere; (2) legitimisation and justification of Russia’s actions directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; (3) criticism of the sanctions imposed on Russia in relation to its aggression towards Ukraine; (4) cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik); (5) membership in pro-Kremlin movements, groups and organisations.

“International observers” were highly visible in the media space of the DPR and LPR: more than one-third of all news stories published on the voting day mentioned “international observers”.

“International observers” were invited to the DPR and LPR in order to provide a sense of general legitimacy and normalcy to the “elections” in the eyes of the domestic and Russian audiences.

Aiming to provide legitimacy to the otherwise illegitimate “elections”, the media of the DPR, LPR and Russia disinformed their audiences about the real international perception of the “general elections”, as well as promoting the following five major narratives: (1) the “elections” did not run counter to the Minsk agreements, and, therefore, were legitimate; (2) the “elections” were characterised by a high turnout and active participation; (3) the “elections” took place in a calm and orderly manner; (4) the life in the DPR and LPR is safe and peaceful; and (5) the international community should recognise the “elections”, as well as independence and sovereignty of the DPR and LPR.

Introduction

On the 11 November 2018, two internationally unrecognised “states”, Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR), held “elections” to elect heads of their “republics” and members of their “parliaments”. Both “states” are geographically located within the internationally recognised borders of Ukraine (in particular areas of Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts), but in April 2014 pro-Russian separatists, who received military, financial and political backing from the Russian Federation, declared independence from Ukraine.

No internationally recognised state recognises the DPR and LPR as sovereign states, but they are recognised as such by each other, as well as Abkhazia, a partially recognised breakaway “republic” located within the internationally recognised borders of Georgia. Russia does not recognise either the DPR or LPR, but it still provides political, military, financial and other support for the functioning of the two “states”. Ukraine refers to their territories as “temporarily occupied and uncontrolled territories of Ukraine” and identifies the DPR and LPR as “terrorist organisations”.¹

In September 2014, representatives of Ukraine, Russia, DPR, LPR and OSCE signed the so-called Minsk Protocol aimed at ending the war between Ukrainian and (pro-)Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine. In particular, the Minsk Protocol stated the need to “ensure early local elections in accordance with the Ukrainian

1 “Ukraine’s Prosecutor General Classifies Self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk Republics as Terrorist Organizations”, *Kyiv Post*, 16 May (2014), <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/war-against-ukraine/ukraines-prosecutor-general-classifies-self-declared-donetsk-and-luhansk-republics-as-terrorist-organizations-348212.html>.

law ‘On temporary Order of Local Self-Governance in Particular Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts’.²

However, the DPR and LPR held their first “general elections” on 2 November 2014 outside the framework set by the Ukrainian law. In the run-up to the “elections”, neither Ukraine, nor the EU or established international organisations such as the United Nations or OSCE said that they would recognise them. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deplored “the planned holding by armed rebel groups in eastern Ukraine of their own ‘elections’ on 2 November, in breach of the Constitution and national law”, saying that those “elections” would “seriously undermine the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum”.³ The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Didier Burkhalter stated that the “elections” in the DPR and LPR would run “counter to the letter and spirit of the Minsk Protocol and would further complicate its implementation”.⁴ Despite this, Russia recognised the “elections” in November 2014.

On 7 September 2018, the authorities of the DPR and LPR declared that they would hold “elections” on 11 November 2018.⁵ As in the case of the “elections” in 2014, the “elections” would be held according to the “laws” of the DPR and LPR, rather than the Ukrainian law, as stipulated in the Minsk Protocol. As a result, Ukraine, the EU and OSCE declared that they would not recognise the “elections” in the DPR and LPR.⁶ The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Enzo Moavero Milanesi stated that they were “extremely concerned by the announcement

- 2 “Protocol on the Results of Consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group, Signed in Minsk, 5 September 2014”, *OSCE*, 5 September (2014), <https://www.osce.org/home/123257>.
- 3 “Secretary-General Deplores Unconstitutional Elections Called by Armed Rebel Groups in Ukraine”, *United Nations*, 29 October (2014), <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm16291.doc.htm>.
- 4 “So-called Elections not in Line with Minsk Protocol, Says OSCE Chair, Calling for Enhanced Efforts and Dialogue to Implement All Commitments”, *OSCE*, 31 October (2014), <https://www.osce.org/cio/126242>.
- 5 “O naznachenni vneocherednykh vyborov Glavy Donetskoy Narodnoy Respubliki i ocherednykh vyborov deputatov Narodnogo Soveta Donetskoy Narodnoy Respubliki”, *Narodny Sovet DNR*, 7 September (2018), <https://dnrsovet.su/doc/post/1048P-NS.pdf>; “Narodny Sovet naznchil vybory deputatov parlamenta i glavy LNR na 11 noyabrya”, *TsIK LNR*, 7 September (2018), <https://tsiklnr.su/news/287-narodnyy-sovet-naznachil-vybory-deputatov-parlamenta-i-glavy-lnr-na-11-noyabrya.html>.
- 6 “Fake Elections in Donbas Will Not Have Any Legal Force and Will Not Be Recognized by the International Community – President”, *President of Ukraine*, 1 November (2018), <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/cherhovi-fejkovi-vibori-na-donbasi-ne-matimut-zhodnoyi-yurid-50734>; “Statement on the Announcement of ‘Elections’ in the So-called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ and ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’”, *European External Action Service*, 8 September (2018), https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50243/statement-announcement-elections-so-called-luhansk-peoples-republic-and-donetsk-peoples_en; “OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Moavero Milanesi Extremely Concerned by Announced ‘Elections’ in Certain Areas of Donetsk and Lugansk, Ukraine”, *OSCE*, 8 November (2018), <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/402440>.



Observers Rochedy, Isihos, Mariani, Moreau, Penris, Kovitidi and Tsekov

Source: <https://dnr-online.ru/menya-raduet-cto-respublika-razvivaetsya-mezhdunarodny-nablyudatel-iz-frantsii-dzhulian-roshedi/>

of ‘elections’ due to be held in certain areas of Donetsk and Lugansk on 11 November”, adding that “such a decision would run counter to the letter and the spirit of the Minsk agreements”.⁷ The EU considered the “elections” in the DPR and LPR as “illegal and illegitimate” and condemned them as they were “in breach of international law, undermine[d] the commitments taken under the Minsk agreements and violate[d] Ukraine’s sovereignty and law”.⁸

Russian authorities, however, disagreed with the international approaches to the “elections” in the DPR and LPR. According to Maria Zakharova, an official representative of Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the “elections” allegedly had nothing to do with the Minsk agreements.⁹ In her argument, she referred

7 Ibid.

8 “Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on the ‘Elections’ Planned in the So-called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ and ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ for 11 November 2018”, *Council of the European Union*, 10 November (2018), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/11/10/declaration-of-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-elections-planned-in-the-so-called-luhansk-people-s-republic-and-donetsk-people-s-republic-for-11-november-2018/>.

9 “Zakharova: predstavlyashchie vybory v Donbasse ne imeyut otnosheniya k minskim soglasheniyam”, *TASS*, 1 November (2018); <https://tass.ru/politika/5748150>.

not to the Minsk Protocol, but to the so-called Minsk II, an agreement signed in February 2015. While differing from the Minsk Protocol, the Minsk II agreement, nevertheless, referred to “elections in accordance with the Ukrainian legislation and the Law of Ukraine ‘On temporary Order of Local Self-Governance in Particular Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts’”.¹⁰

In the international evaluations of the legitimacy of the “elections” in the DPR and LPR, no established Western or international organisation sent any observers to monitor the “elections” in the DPR and LPR. Interestingly, the Russian official bodies also decided not to send any observers to either DPR or LPR. As the deputy head of the Russian Central Election Commission Nikolay Bulaev stated, they were not invited to monitor the “elections” and did not have agreements with the relevant offices in the DPR and LPR.¹¹

“International observers” in the DPR and LPR

In November 2014, the “general elections” in the DNR and LNR were “monitored” by around 45 international “observers” coming from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, USA, and so-called South Ossetia, a partially recognised breakaway “republic” located within the internationally recognised borders of Georgia. The international “observation” was, at that time, coordinated by three main organisations: (1) Russia-based Civic Control Association headed by Aleksandr Brod, (2) Belgium-based Eurasian Observatory of Democracy and Elections headed by a far-right activist Luc Michel (the “observation” mission was, however, coordinated by Fabrice Beaur), and (3) European Centre for Geopolitical Analysis run by a far-right politician Mateusz Piskorski, who would be later arrested by the Polish police on suspicion of participating in the activities of the Russian civilian intelligence directed against the Republic of Poland.

In 2018, international “observation” in the DPR and LPR was officially regulated by the rulings given by “central election committees” (CEC) of the DPR and LPR. The DPR CEC gave such a ruling on 20 September 2018,¹² while the LPR CEC did the same on 9 October 2018.¹³ Both rulings, referred to the “laws”

10 “Kompleks mer po vypolneniyu Minskikh soglasheniy”, OSCE, 12 February (2015); <https://www.osce.org/ru/cio/140221>.

11 “V TsIK Rossii zayavili, chto ne budut nablyudat’ za vyborami v DNR i LNR”, *Rossiya Segodnya*, 31 October (2018), <https://ria.ru/politics/20181031/1531848634.html>.

12 “Postanovlenie #10 ot 20.09.2018”, *TsIK DNR*, 20 September (2018), <https://cikdnr.su/postanovlenie-10-ot-20-09-2018/>.

13 “Postanovlenie #57 ot 09 oktyabrya 2018 goda”, *TsIK LNR*, 10 October (2018), <https://tsiklnr.su/news/412-postanovlenie-57-ot-09-oktyabrya-2018-goda.html>.

of the respective “republics” and, to a significant degree, differed – especially annexes to those rulings – in contents. For example, the DPR’s ruling held that only those individuals who did not live on the territory of the DPR could be an international observer, while the LPR’s ruling did not have such a provision.

On 6 November, the LPR CEC announced that the “elections” would be monitored by 45 “international observers” from Abkhazia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Ireland, Kongo, Netherlands, Norway, Palestine, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, South Ossetia, Syria, Turkey, USA and Yemen.¹⁴ The DPR CEC made a similar announcement on 7 November stating that it accredited 48 “foreign observers” from Abkhazia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, South Ossetia and Turkey.¹⁵

Neither the DPR CEC nor the LPR CEC has published full lists of the “international observers” at the “general elections”, the analysis of the DPR, LPR and Russian media, as well as social networks and other publicly available sources, allowed us to identify 39 out of 48 “observers” in the case of the DPR (see Table 1), and 43 out of 48 “observers” in the case of the LPR (see Table 2).

**Table 1. Identified international “observers”
at the “general elections” in the DPR**

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation/work
1	“Abkhazia”	Oleg Nurievich Arshba	Deputy Foreign Minister
2	“Abkhazia”	Tamaz Yurievich Gogiya	Chairman of the Central Election Committee
3	Austria	Patrick Poppel	Suvorov Institute
4	Belgium	Kris Roman	Euro-Rus association
5	Belgium	Jan Penris	Flemish Interest; member of the Chamber of Representatives of the Federal Parliament of Belgium
6	Chile	Isaac Márquez	*unknown
7	Finland	Johan Bäckman	*unknown
8	France	François Mauld d’Aymée	Donetsk Symphony Orchestra
9	France	Nicolas Dhuciq	The Republicans
10	France	Andréa Kotarac	Unbowed France; member of the regional council of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes.

14 “Observers from 22 Countries Confirm Readiness to Arrive in LPR for Nov 11 Elections – CEC”, *Lugansk Media Centre*, 6 November (2018), <http://en.lug-info.com/news/one/observers-from-22-countries-confirm-readiness-to-arrive-in-lpr-for-nov-11-elections-cec-19606>.

15 “TsIK zaregistroval mezhdunarodnykh nablyudateley na vneocherednykh vyborah Glavy DNR i deputatov Narodnogo Soveta”, *TsIK DNR*, 7 November (2018), <https://cikdnr.su/2018/11/07/cik-zaregistroval-mezhdunarodnyh-nablyudatelej-na-vneocherednyh-vyborah-glavy-dnr-i-deputatov-narodnogo-soveta/>.

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation/work
11	France	Thierry Mariani	The Republicans
12	France	Nikola Mirkovic	Association "West – East"
13	France	Xavier Moreau	Sokol Holding
14	France	Christelle Neant	DONi International Press Center
15	France	Julien Rochedy	*unknown
16	France	Alexis Tarrade	The Republicans
17	France	Quentin Vercruysse	The Republicans
18	France	Michel Voisin	The Republicans
19	Germany	Richard Gretzinger	Alternative for Germany
20	Germany	Artur Leier	The Left
21	Germany	Gunnar Norbert Lindemann	Alternative for Germany; member of the Berlin state parliament
22	Germany	Manuel Ochsenreiter	Editor of Magazine <i>Zuerst!</i>
23	Greece	Kostas Isihos	Syryza; former Deputy Minister of National Defence
24	Italy	Eliseo Bertolasi	*unknown
25	Italy	Giulietto Chiesa	*unknown
26	Italy	Alessandro Musolino	Forward Italy
27	Italy	Antonio Razzi	Forward Italy
28	Italy	Palmarino Zoccatelli	League; vice president of the Veneto-Russia Cultural Association
29	Netherlands	Pascal Hillebrand	*unknown
30	Russia	Olga Fyodorovna Kovitidi	Member of the Federation Council
31	Russia	Andrey Dmitrievich Kozenko	United Russia, Member of the State Duma
32	Russia	Dmitriy Vadimovich Sablin	United Russia, Member of the State Duma
33	Russia	Kazbek Kutsukovich Taysayev	Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Member of the State Duma
34	Russia	Sergey Pavlovich Tsekov	Member of the Federation Council
35	Russia	Viktor Petrovich Vodolatskiy	United Russia, Member of the State Duma
36	Russia	Aleksandr Andreyevich Yushchenko	Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Member of the State Duma
37	"South Ossetia"	Igor Gedevanovich Chochiev	Member of the parliament of South Ossetia
38	"South Ossetia"	Ruslan Zaurovich Tadeyev	Minister of State Property and Land Matters
39	Turkey	Okay Deprem	Correspondent for the <i>Evrensel</i> newspaper

Table 2. Identified international "observers" at the "general elections" in the LPR

No.	Country	Country	Affiliation/work
1	"Abkhazia"	Almaskhan Zurabovich Ardzinba	Member of the Parliament of Abkhazia
2	"Abkhazia"	Georgiy Chichikoevich Dumava	Assistant to Foreign Minister of Abkhazia
3	"Abkhazia"	Astamur Omarovich Logua	Member of the Parliament of Abkhazia

No.	Country	Country	Affiliation/work
4	“Abkhazia”	Astamur Rufetovich Pachaliya	Bloc of Opposition Forces; member of Abkhazia’s Central Election Committee
5	“Abkhazia”	Aleksandr Alekseyevich Romanenko	*unknown
6	Belgium	Frank Creyelman	Flemish Interest
7	Belgium	Christian Verougstraete	Flemish Interest; former Member of the Flemish Parliament
8	Brazil	Humberto Setembrino Corrêa Carvalho	Communist Party of Brazil
9	Brazil	Nubem Medeiros	Communist Party of Brazil
10	Brazil	Claudio Ribeiro	*unknown
11	Canada	John Bosnitch	*unknown
12	Finland	Jarmo Ekman	Finland-Novorossiya Friendship Society
13	Finland	Jon Krister Hellevig	Hellevig, Klein & Usov Llc.
14	Finland	Janus Putkonen	Director of the DONi International Press Center
15	Germany	Olaf Kießling	Alternative for Germany; member of the Thuringian regional parliament
16	Germany	Andreas Maurer	The Left, member of the regional council of Quakenbrück.
17	Germany	Tatjana Aleksandrovna Raab-Alifanova	*unknown
18	Germany	Marco Samm	Mod’s Hair Freiburg
19	Greece	Stathis Stavropoulos	*unknown
20	Hungary	Tamás Gergő Samu	Jobbik
21	Iraq	Mudihir Mohammed Avad Mudihir	Student at the Tambov State University
22	Ireland	Francis Hughes	*unknown
23	Netherlands	Ronald van Amerongen	*unknown
24	Norway	Bjørn Ditlef Nistad	*unknown
25	“Palestine”	Saleh Mosab	Head of the “Sadyg” Arab Cultural Centre
26	Poland	Tomasz Małodobry	*unknown
27	Russia	Aleksey Nikolayevich Didenko	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia; Member of the State Duma
28	Russia	Sergey Aleksandrovich Shargunov	Communist Party of the Russian Federation; Member of the State Duma
29	Russia	Mikhail Viktorovich Shchapov	Communist Party of the Russian Federation; Member of the State Duma
30	Russia	Aleksandr Sergeyevich Starovoytov	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia; Member of the State Duma
31	Russia	Olga Viktorovna Timofeyeva	United Russia; deputy Chair of the State Duma
32	Russia	Aleksey Aleksandrovich Zhuravlyov	Motherland/United Russia; Member of the State Duma
33	Serbia	Zoran Krstić	*unknown
34	Serbia	Ninoslav Milošević	*unknown
35	Serbia	Miodrag Zarković	*unknown
36	“South Ossetia”	David Otarovich Gazzaev	Assistant to President of South Ossetia
37	“South Ossetia”	Igor Vakhtangovich Kozaev	Presidential Administration of South Ossetia

No.	Country	Country	Affiliation/work
38	"South Ossetia"	Bakhva Otarovich Tedeyev	*unknown
39	Syria	Sa'ed Ibrahim Haneef	Student at the Mordovian State University
40	USA	George Eliason	*unknown
41	Yemen	Al Khasheb Rashid Abdulkudos	Student at the Orel State University
42	*unknown	Mohamed Ali Sanaa Omer Abdel Bagi	Student at the Lugansk Taras Shevchenko National University
43	*unknown	Ljubomir Radinović	Motherland party; chairman of the Society of Russian-Serbian-Montenegrin Friendship

Established involvement of “international observers” in pro-Kremlin efforts

The overwhelming majority of non-Russian “international observers” who “monitored” the “general elections” in the DPR and LPR have a record of previous involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts that involve, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and elsewhere;
- legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine);
- criticism of the American and European sanctions imposed on Russia in relation to its aggression towards Ukraine;
- cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.);
- membership in Western and Russian pro-Kremlin organisations, movements and groups.

Convicted electoral fraudster¹⁶ **Andreas Maurer**, the head of German far-left Die Linke (The Left) party group of the Quakenbrück parliament, has illegally travelled to Crimea several times since June 2016 and, during his first visit, suggested that the Osnabrück parliament could recognise the “Russian status”

16 Von Jean-Charles Fays, “Quakenbrücker Wahlfälschung: Andreas Maurer verurteilt”, *Bersenbrücker Kreisblatt*, 11 June (2018), <https://www.noz.de/lokales/samtgemeinde-bersenbrueck/artikel/1257710/quakenbruecker-wahlfalschung-andreas-maurer-verurteilt>.



Andreas Maurer (right).

Source: <http://lug-info.com/news/one/luganskaya-narodnaya-respublika-sostoyalas-kak-gosudarstvo-nablyudatel-iz-germanii-foto-40069>

of Crimea. **Maurer** is a regular commentator for the Russian state media, and – presenting himself as the leader of the “Public Diplomacy Germany” project – he travelled to the DPR in February 2018 to discuss “further cooperation opportunities [and] business partnership”.¹⁷ In March 2018, **Maurer** “monitored” the illegitimate Russian presidential election in Crimea.¹⁸

Artur Leier is a personal referent of a Member of the Hamburg Parliament Martin Dolzer from Die Linke. **Leier** illegally visited Crimea in March 2018 as a participant of the Forum “Russia – a Country of Opportunities” and took part in the Russian propaganda event titled “Fourth Yalta International Economic Forum” in April 2018.

Johan Bäckman is a long-time pro-Kremlin political activist who was sentenced, in October 2018, to one-year conditional imprisonment for unlawful

17 “Zakharchenko Meets Politicians and Social Activists from Russia, Germany and Norway”, *DAN*, 19 February (2018), <https://dan-news.info/en/world-en/zakharchenko-meets-politicians-and-social-activists-from-russia-germany-and-norway.html>.

18 See Anton Shekhovtsov, “Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate Presidential Election in Crimea in March 2018”, *European Platform for Democratic Elections*, 3 April (2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/foreign-observation-of-the-illegitimate-presidential-election-in-crimea-in-march-2018-1375.html>.

persecution, gross negligence and incitement to gross negligence related to a Finnish journalist who investigated the activities of the Russian “troll factory”. He observed the illegitimate “referendum” in Crimea in March 2014, “primary regional elections” in the DPR in October 2016, and Russian illegitimate “presidential election” in Crimea in March 2018. In May 2014, **Bäckman** declared himself a representative of the DPR in Finland. In May 2016, he participated in the “Donbass Struggle for Independence” roundtable held in Donetsk. For his blatant pro-Kremlin activities elsewhere, **Bäckman** was banned from entering Estonia and Moldova in 2009 and 2014 respectively.

Despite the DPR’s ruling on “international observers” that identified them as foreign individuals not living on the territory of the “republic”, the DPR CEC presumably allowed at least four “international observers” to violate this ruling. A French journalist **Christelle Neant** and a Chilean volunteer fighter **Isaac Márquez** have been living in the DPR since 2016 and even obtained the DPR’s “passports” in 2016 and 2017 respectively. A French volunteer fighter **François Mauld d’Aymée** arrived in the DPR in 2015 and is now a singer at the Donetsk Symphony Orchestra. Dutch volunteer fighter **Pascal Hillebrand** has been living in the DPR with his family since 2017 and he applied for the DPR’s “citizenship”.

French former MP **Thierry Mariani** is the head of the openly pro-Kremlin French-Russian Dialogue Association. In April 2015, he travelled to Moscow where he declared that the EU’s “anti-Russian” sanctions had to be lifted. In July 2015, he illegally travelled to Crimea as a member of a French delegation that included, inter alia, **Nicolas Dhucq** and **Michel Voisin**. In September 2017, **Mariani**, **Dhucq** and **Voisin** participated in the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia, and, in March 2018, **Mariani** observed the Russian 2018 presidential election as a member of the political biased international monitoring mission.¹⁹

Representatives of The Republicans in Russia, **Quentin Vercruyse** and **Alexis Tarrade**, are commentators for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website.

Nikola Mirkovic, president of the Association “West – East” that claims to provide humanitarian help for the residents of Eastern Ukraine, is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled RT and Sputnik website.

Andréa Kotarac, a member of the regional council of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, illegally travelled to the DPR in May 2018 and met with its leadership. The

19 See Anton Shekhovtsov, “Politically Biased Foreign Electoral Observation at the Russian 2018 Presidential Election”, *European Platform for Democratic Elections*, 16 April (2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/documents/details/politically-biased-foreign-electoral-observation-at-the-russian-2018-presidential-election-1423.html>.



Thierry Mariani and Xavier Moreau.

Source: <https://dnr-online.ru/ya-vizhu-chno-ukraina-stoporit-minskij-protsess-nablyudatel-iz-frantsii-terri-mariani/>

meeting was also attended by **Manuel Ochsenreiter**, **Andreas Maurer**, **Gunnar Norbert Lindemann**, **Johan Bäckman** and **Eliseo Bertolasi**.

Former paratrooper officer **Xavier Moreau**, who holds dual French-Russian citizenship, owns the Moscow-based Sokol Holding that employs former members of French Army elite troops and Russian security services, as well as providing consultancy and security to French companies. **Moreau** played an important role in establishing contacts between the French far-right National Front party and Russian actors.

Julien Rochedy, the former leader of the National Front Youth, a youth wing of the French National Front, took part in the Russian propaganda event titled “Fourth Yalta International Economic Forum” held in Russia-annexed Crimea in April 2018.

Editor of the far-right magazine *Zuerst!* **Manuel Ochsenreiter** is a long-term pro-Kremlin activist. He is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled RT and Sputnik website. He observed the illegitimate “referendum” in Crimea in March 2014, “general elections” in the DPR in November 2014,

“primary regional elections” in the DPR in October 2016, and Russian illegitimate “presidential election” in Crimea in March 2018. In May 2015, **Ochsenreiter** participated in the propaganda event called “Donbass: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow” held in the DPR.

Richard Gretzinger, Olaf Kießling and **Gunnar Norbert Lindemann** are members of the German far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party that opposes the EU sanctions imposed on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine. **Gretzinger** is also a member of the “Russian Germans for the AfD” group within the AfD.

An Italian centre-right politician **Alessandro Musolino** was part of the politically biased international observation missions at the Russian 2011 parliamentary elections, Russian 2012 presidential election, Ukrainian 2012 parliamentary elections, illegitimate 2014 “parliamentary elections” in the DPR, Russian 2018 presidential election and Cambodian 2018 general elections. **Musolino** also took part in the conference “Donbass: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” that was held in Russia-occupied Donetsk in May 2015. **Musolino’s** fellow party member **Antonio Razzi** monitored the Cambodian 2018 general elections too, as part of the politically biased international observation mission organised by the Russian actors.

Eliseo Bertolasi is an associate researcher of the pro-Kremlin Institute of Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Auxiliary Sciences and correspondent of the Rossiya Segodnya news agency. He contributed to the development of the pro-Kremlin Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association established by the Italian far-right Northern League party. In October 2016, he observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR. Together with **Palmarino Zoccatelli, Bertolasi** participated in the “Donbass Struggle for Independence” roundtable held in Donetsk in May 2016. **Zoccatelli** is also vice-president of the Veneto branch of the pro-Kremlin Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association.

Patrick Poppel is the general secretary of the Austria-based pro-Kremlin Suvorov Institute. In 2006-2007, **Poppel** was a regular contributor to the Russian, fiercely anti-Western website Katehon established by the Russian ultranationalist businessman Konstantin Malofeev. In 2016, he demonstrated in Vienna holding a flag of the so-called Novorossiia (New Russia), a non-existent separatist state allegedly located within the internationally recognised borders of Ukraine. In January 2018, **Poppel** co-hosted a visit of Russian fascist Alexander Dugin to Vienna. He also monitored the Russian illegitimate “presidential election” in Crimea in March 2018.

Members of the Belgian far-right Flemish Interest party **Frank Creyelman, Jan Penris** and **Christian Verougstraete** observed the illegitimate “referendum”

in Crimea in March 2014. **Penris** and **Creyelman** were part of the politically biased election observation mission at the Russian regional elections in September 2014, while **Creyelman** also observed the illegitimate 2014 “parliamentary elections” in the DPR and was part of the politically biased observation mission at the Ukrainian 2012 parliamentary elections.

Belgian far-right activist **Kris Roman** is the leader of the fringe Euro-Rus association (possibly consisting of only Roman himself). He is a regular commentator for the pro-Kremlin media and participated in the “Donbass Struggle for Independence” roundtable held in Donetsk in May 2016. In September 2017, together with **Humberto Setembrino Corrêa Carvalho**, **Roman** participated in the pro-Kremlin conference “1917-2017. Russia, Ukraine and the World” in Moscow; they were also joined by **Janus Putkonen** and **Eliseo Bertolasi**. In November 2018, Roman took part – together with **Carvalho** and **Claudio Ribeiro** – in the anti-Western conference “Red Square/Molotov Club” in Moscow.

Okay Deprem is a correspondent for the Turkish newspaper *Evrensel*. In October 2016, he observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR. **Deprem** is also a co-author of the book *Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin: The Leader who Raised Russia* that, expectedly, offers praise of Putin.

Italian conspiracy theorist **Giulietto Chiesa** is a long-term supporter of the Kremlin’s policies and a regular contributor to the Italian edition of the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website. In December 2014, he was detained and then deported from Estonia for his apparent involvement in the Russian influence operations. In September 2016, he participated in the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia, and, in October the same year, **Chiesa** observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR.

Janus Putkonen is Director of the DONi International Press Center that was established in the DPR in July 2015 and became an official media resource of the DPR in September 2016. The same month, **Putkonen** was granted a “passport” of the DPR. He was responsible for providing the DPR’s “security services” with background analysis on journalists who wanted to enter the DPR’s territory.

John Bosnitch is a regular contributor to the Russian state-controlled media such as RT and Sputnik.

Serbian sports reporter **Miodrag Zarković** observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR in October 2016.

Polish activist **Tomasz Małodobry** illegally visited Luhansk in May 2018 and provides pro-separatist comments for the Russian media.

Although presented as a Serbian observer, **Ljubomir Radinović** has been living in the Russian city of Voronezh since 2000. He is the head of the regional branch of the Russian far-right Motherland party and chairman of the Society of Russian-Serbian-Montenegrin Friendship. In April 2018, he illegally visited the Luhansk Oblast as part of the Serbian delegation.

Jarmo Ekman claims to be the head of the Finland-Novorossiia Friendship Society. He illegally travelled to the DPR several times and observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR in October 2016.

Greek cartoonist **Stathis Stavropoulos** participated in a pro-Kremlin propaganda event called “Art and Politics” that took place in Athens in March 2017. The same event hosted Zakhar Prilepin, who at that time led one of the volunteer battalions in the DPR, and Russian observer Sergey Shargunov.

Bjørn Nistad is a long-term pro-Kremlin activist and a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website.

Finnish businessman **Jon Krister Hellevig** has been working in Russia since the 1990s. He is a regular contributor to the Russian state-controlled RT and Sputnik.

Serbian activist **Ninoslav Milošević** is a former volunteer fighter who was sentenced to six months of home imprisonment for his participation in the Russian-Ukrainian war on the side of the DPR.

Foreign electoral observation as an instrument of propaganda

As the “elections” in the DPR and LPR were not considered legitimate by the international community, “international observers” were invited to the “republics” to provide a sense of general legitimacy and normalcy to the “elections” in the eyes of the domestic and Russian audiences. The major message was a logical fallacy that can be presented as: “legitimate and normal elections are monitored by foreign observers – the elections in the DPR and LPR are monitored by foreign observers, hence the elections are legitimate and normal”. To achieve this objective, the media of the DPR and LPR promoted specific narratives through the comments given by the “international observers” and disinformed the domestic and Russian audiences about the real international perception of the “general elections” in the “republics”. The visibility of “international observers” in the media of the DPR and LPR was very high. Out of 60 news stories published by the DPR’s “Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika” website (dnr-online.ru, DNR) on the voting day, i.e. 11 November 2018, 22 news stories (or almost 37%) were devoted to “international observers”. And,

out of 88 news stories, published by the LPR’s “Lugansl Media Centre” (lug-info.com, LMC), 34 news stories (or almost 39%) talked about the “international observers”.

The analysis of the reports published before and during the “elections” showed that the media of the DPR and LPR promoted the following five major narratives:

1. The “general elections” had nothing to do with the Minsk agreements and did not run counter to them. The media of the DPR and LPR promoted this narrative most actively in the run-up to the elections, and, to promote it, the media used those individuals who resided in the “republics”. Therefore, before the “elections” took place, the media asked for comments about the Minsk agreements from the following “observers”: in the case of the LPR, those were Al Khasheb Rashid Abdulkudus, Janus Putkonen, George Eliason and Ronald van Amerongen;²⁰ in the case of the DPR, those were Pascal Hillebrand, Isaac Márquez and Okay Deprem.²¹
2. The “general elections” were characterised by a very high turnout and active participation of the citizens of the DPR and LPR. This narrative was promoted most actively on the voting day, and especially in the LPR. Almost 65% of the news stories published by the LMC about “international observers” on 11 November stressed the high turnout and active participation, while the same was true only for 10% of the news stories published by the DNR.
3. The “general elections” took place in a calm and orderly manner. Again, this narrative was especially widespread in the LPR’s media.
4. The life in the DPR and LPR is safe and peaceful.
5. The international community should recognise the “general elections”, and – by extension – the sovereignty of the DPR and LPR.

20 “Vyборы v LNR ne protivorechat Minskim soglasheniyam – mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli”, *Luganskiy informatsionny tsentr*, 31 October (2018), <http://lug-info.com/news/one/lnr-gotovitsya-k-vyboram-otkryto-i-s-soblyudeniem-osnovnykh-norm-demokratii-nablyudateli-39753>; “Zapad podmenyaet ponyatiya, govorya o protivorechii vyborov ‘Minsku’ – nablyudatel’ iz Finlyandii”, *Luganskiy informatsionny tsentr*, 6 November (2018), <http://lug-info.com/news/one/zapad-podmenyaet-ponyatiya-govorya-o-protivorechii-vyborov-minsku-nablyudatel-iz-finlyandii-39911>; “Predstoyashchie vybory v LNR ne protivorechat Minskim soglasheniyam – nablyudatel’ iz Niderlandov”, *Luganskiy informatsionny tsentr*, 30 October (2018), <http://lug-info.com/news/one/predstoyaschie-vybory-v-lnr-ne-protivorechat-minskim-soglasheniyam-nablyudatel-iz-niderlandov-39724>.

21 Tsesanna Antonenko, “Vyборы v DNR 2018: mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli vysoko otsenili podgotovku Respubliki”, *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 1 November (2018), <https://www.donetsk.kp.ru/online/news/3283772/>.

Conclusion

As the holding of “general elections” in the DPR and LPR ran counter to the Minsk agreements, the international community considered those “elections” as illegitimate and did not send any observers to monitor them. In an attempt to fill the void of legitimacy, the “authorities” of the DPR and LPR claimed to have invited 48 and 45 “international observers” respectively.

Out of 39 identified “observers” in the case of the DPR, 24 were foreign politicians and state officials; out of the 43 identified “observers” in the case of the LPR, 20 were foreign politicians and state officials. Other “observers” were predominantly businessmen, students, journalists, and far-right and far-left activists and conspiracy theorists.

The overwhelming majority of non-Russian “international observers” who were present at the “general elections” in the two “republics” had already been involved in various pro-Kremlin efforts, such as: (1) previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and elsewhere; (2) legitimisation and justification of Russia’s actions directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; (3) criticism of the sanctions imposed on Russia in relation to its aggression towards Ukraine; (4) cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik); (5) membership in pro-Kremlin movements, groups and organisations.

“International observers” were highly visible in the media space of the DPR and LPR: more than one-third of all news stories published on the voting day in the DNR and LMC mentioned “international observers”. They were invited to the DPR and LPR in order to provide a sense of general legitimacy and normalcy to the “elections” in the eyes of the domestic and Russian audiences. In a pursuit of this objective, the media of the DPR, LPR and Russia disinformed their audiences about the real international perception of the “general elections”, as well as promoting the following five major narratives: (1) the “elections” did not run counter to the Minsk agreements, and, therefore, were legitimate; (2) the “elections” were characterised by a high turnout and active participation; (3) the “elections” took place in a calm and orderly manner; (4) the life in the DPR and LPR is safe and peaceful; and (5) the international community should recognise the “elections”, as well as independence and sovereignty of the DPR and LPR.



See more reports in the “Documents“ section on www.epde.org

Subscribe to our monthly newsletter on www.epde.org/en/newsletter.html

Visit our social media channels on

 facebook.com/epde.electionsmonitoring

 [@epde_org](https://twitter.com/epde_org)

The EPDE members are:

Belarusian Helsinki Committee BHC (Belarus)

Committee of Voters of Ukraine CVU (Ukraine)

Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center EMDS (Azerbaijan)

European Exchange (Germany)

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor (Armenia)

Human Rights Center Viasna (Belarus)

International Elections Study Center IESC (Lithuania)

International Society for Free Elections and Democracy ISFED (Georgia)

Norwegian Helsinki Committee NHC (Norway)

Civil Network OPORA (Ukraine)

Promo-Lex Association (Moldova)

Stefan Batory Foundation (Poland)

Swedish International Liberal Centre SILC (Sweden)

Transparency International Anticorruption Center (Armenia)



The European Platform of Election Observation (EPDE) improves the professional quality through development and implementation of unified standards and comparable observation methods of the domestic election observation networks in Europe. EPDE encourages, trains and defends those experts and citizens who stand up for transparent and equal suffrage wherever it is at risk all over Europe - be it in the European Union's member states or in the European neighbourhood.

EPDE is a signatory of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observation. EPDE also is a member of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM).

www.epde.org