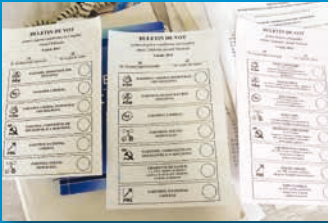


## Politically biased election observation - a threat to the integrity of international institutions



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## Politically biased election observation—a threat to the integrity of international institutions

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](http://www.epde.org)

EDPE hereby refers to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and **Code of Conduct for International Election Observation**<sup>1</sup> 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.
- 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.

1 [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/1923\\_declaration\\_102705\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/1923_declaration_102705_0.pdf)

- EPDE observes a tendency that election administrations in some countries of the OSCE region deliberately **deny accreditation to independent international EOM**<sup>2</sup> 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.
- 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.

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.



- 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 7<sup>th</sup> 2017 in the European Parliament in Brussels.*

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

*Anton Shekhovtsov*



*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.*

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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



*Cypriot observers Sofoklis Yanni Sofokli (left) and Skevi Koukouma.*

- 1 Dmitry Laru, Angelina Galanina, “Krym ne ostavyat bez nablyudeniya”, *Izvestiya*, 25 December (2017), <https://iz.ru/686918/dmitrii-laru-angelina-galanina/krym-ne-ostaviat-bez-nabliudeniia>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 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-posetiit-prezidentskie-vybory-v-rossii>.

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”<sup>5</sup>

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 [...]”<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.

## 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.<sup>9</sup> 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

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

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

7 “Italyanskiy zhurnalist: priedu na vybory v Krym, nesmotrya na ugrozu 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](https://ria.ru/election2018_news/20180216/1514779225.html).

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

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 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,<sup>10</sup> 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 Wåhlander.<sup>11</sup> 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 to determine what particular observers were invited either by Kobrinsky, or Navoyan, or Simonyan. However, it seems viable to suggest that Kobrinskiy had known

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.



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

Hollænder 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.<sup>12</sup>

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)<sup>13</sup> presided by Thierry

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/>.

Mariani, a member of the French centre-right Republicans party and former MP.<sup>14</sup> The RPF's Slutsky, who was recently accused of sexual harassment by several Russian female journalists<sup>15</sup> and is, like Kobrinskiy, a member of the far-right LPDR, has been in contact with the ADFR at least since 2006.<sup>16</sup> Slutsky is a member of the ADFR,<sup>17</sup> and his RPF funded Mariani's trips to Moscow and Russia-annexed Crimea in 2015.<sup>18</sup> 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".<sup>19</sup> 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.

- 
- 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-leonida-slutskogo-v-domogatelstvah-oni-mogut-podat-v-sud-a-cto-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/09/04/2015/552668fa9a7947cca2177670>; "Glava frantsuzskoy parlamentskoy delegatsii rasskazal o tsenyakh vizita v Krym", *TASS*, 22 July (2015), <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/2134645>.
- 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>.

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
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 Gapoņenko	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



No.	Country	Name	Political affiliation	Russian coordinator
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 Wåhlander	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
32	UK	Mohamed Al-Hamali	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
33	Ukraine	Tetyana Mele <sup>A)</sup>	N/A	CCA/AENS/FDEC/ Dialogue
34	USA	Gilbert Doctorow	N/A	*Unknown
35	Venezuela	Carmen Luisa Bohórquez-Morán	United Socialist Party of Venezuela	*Unknown

- A) 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 Khmelnytsky), she currently lives either in Russia (St. Petersburg) or Germany, and spells her name in the Russian way, i.e. “Tatyana”.

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	Zuerst!	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.<sup>20</sup> 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

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,<sup>21</sup> they were not accredited as observers.<sup>22</sup> However, they visited polling stations and made election-related comments for the Russian media,<sup>23</sup> 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.

20 “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-voochiyu-uvidet-krym>.

21 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/](https://mundo.sputniknews.com/radio_que_pasa/201803221077251101-elecciones-presidenciales-en-crimea/).

22 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.

23 “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>.

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 Đứ	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
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”.<sup>24</sup> 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

24 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>.

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 Novorossiya (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.<sup>25</sup>

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 charged, in March 2018, with harassment and aggravated defamation of a Finnish journalist who investigated the activities of the Russian “troll factory”.<sup>26</sup>

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



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

25 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](https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/europa/europastaaten/943553_Russland-hat-das-getan-was-Dugin-zuvor-gesagt-hatte.html).

26 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](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/controversial_academic_charged_over_harassment_slander_of_yle_journalist/10134347).

authorities imposed a 3-year entry ban on Lambert and Myard for illegally crossing the internationally recognised Ukrainian border.<sup>27</sup>

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 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”.<sup>28</sup>

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”.<sup>29</sup> 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 International Economic Forum (YIEF) in April 2016. In January 2018, Ciambetti and several other politicians presented the YIEF at the European Parliament.<sup>30</sup>



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

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

28 “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>.

29 Stian Eisenr ager, Magnus Newth, Ole Kristian Str om, “Norske aktivister f ar kritikk for tur til Krimhalv oya”, *VG*, 6 October (2017), <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/utenriks/russland/norske-aktivister-faar-kritikk-for-tur-til-krimhalvoeya/a/24156607/>.

30 “Izmeneniya v rossiyskom Krymu otsenili v Evroparlamente”, *Lenta*, 23 January (2018), [https://lenta.ru/news/2018/01/23/evroparlamenti\\_krimea/](https://lenta.ru/news/2018/01/23/evroparlamenti_krimea/).



*American observer Gilbert Doctorow at the Simferopol airport.*

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”.<sup>31</sup>

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 2014. In October 2015, she illegally visited Crimea as part of a delegation from Serbia that featured politicians from the ultra-nationalist 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.

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

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.<sup>32</sup> 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 Hollænder, 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 transparent”.<sup>33</sup> 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”.<sup>34</sup>

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

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

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

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



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

“the situation in Crimea [was] calm” and that “the peninsula [was] ready for the Russian presidential election”.<sup>35</sup> 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 calm”.<sup>36</sup> In his turn, Hendrik Weber alleged that the international community presented Russia as a bogeyman, but that was wearing off.<sup>37</sup>

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”.<sup>38</sup>

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

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

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

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



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.<sup>39</sup> Long queues at polling stations were “a welcome surprise” for Diana Lutsker, who said that the election looked like a festive occasion.<sup>40</sup> 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”.<sup>41</sup> The same argument was voiced by Ikhlas Mohammad Tamim.<sup>42</sup>

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.

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

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

40 Ibid.

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

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

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”.

More about EPDE: [www.epde.org](http://www.epde.org)

## Politically Biased Foreign Electoral Observation at the Russian 2018 Presidential Election

Anton Shekhovtsov



*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://ikkk.ru/news/mezhdunarodnye-nablyudateli-ot-evropejskogo-parlamenta-i-mezhdunarodnyh-obshhestvennyh-obedinenij-posetili-krasnodarskij-kraj>

## 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.
- 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

*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

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.

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 <sup>A)</sup>	1
Central Election Commission of South Ossetia <sup>B)</sup>	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
General Election Commission of Mongolia	3

A) The "Republic of Abkhazia" is not recognised as an independent state by the international community.

B) The "Republic of South Ossetia" is not recognised as an independent state by the international community.

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
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1513</b>

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/nabliudateliam-dali-polnuiu-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.<sup>3</sup> (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”.<sup>4</sup> 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 have experience of monitoring elections, are legally competent and understand electoral technologies”.<sup>5</sup>

However, political, ideological and professional positions, as well as personal connections, of many observers among those invited by the Russian Federal Assembly

3 “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](https://ria.ru/radio_brief/20180318/1516657092.html).

4 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>.

5 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>.

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)<sup>6</sup>*

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
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

6 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>.



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 Stanislawski	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	Xinmin Wanbao 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
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	Cyrill 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 Abdollaji <sup>A)</sup>	*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
77	Italy	Gianluca Savoini	Northern League	Moscow
78	Japan	Mitsuhiro Kimura	Issuikai movement	Sykytyvkar
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

A) This name was transliterated from Russian.

100	Serbia	Milovan Drecun	Serbian Progressive Party	*unknown
101	Serbia	Vladimir Đukanović	Serbian Progressive Party	*unknown
102	Serbia	Miloš Đurić	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 Aristegui	Lebanese International University	Krasnogorsk
115	Spain	Pedro Mouriño	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	Nya Tider 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).



*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.264165380370862.64345.10000332205610&type=3&permP age=1>

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 24<sup>7</sup> and around 20<sup>8</sup> foreign observers respectively. At the moment, it is unknown how many foreign observers were invited by the NSM or any other facilitating agency.

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

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

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 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”.<sup>9</sup> 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”.<sup>10</sup>

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”.<sup>11</sup> (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”.<sup>12</sup> These and other similar statements reflect an obvious resentment – on the part of certain Russian electoral monitoring

9 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).

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

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

12 “Vyборы 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>.

organisations closely working with the Russian authorities – about the internationally recognised credibility and reputation of the OSCE/ODIHR.

### 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,<sup>13</sup> although the OSCE/ODIHR concluded that “the conditions necessary for a meaningful democratic election were not established” in Azerbaijan.<sup>14</sup> In March 2017, **Agramunt**, as PACE president, travelled to Syria – together with **Jordi Xuclà i Costa**<sup>15</sup> – 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.

13 “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/](http://caviar-diplomacy.net/azerbaijan/en_US/ассамблея-политической-коррупции-ка/).

14 “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>.

15 “El PPE retira su confianza a Agramunt por su viaje a Siria”, *Levante*, 26 June (2017), <http://www.levantemv.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 **Marini** to Moscow who would say that the “anti-Russian” sanctions had to be lifted. In July 2015, **Marini** illegally travelled to Crimea as part of a larger French delegation.<sup>16</sup> **Marini**’s both trips (to Russia and Crimea) were fully funded by the Russian Peace Foundation (RPF) headed by Slutsky.<sup>17</sup> In December 2015, **Marini** 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,<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> The resolution was 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.<sup>20</sup> In September that year, **Carcaci** was part of the politically biased observation

16 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>.

17 “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>.

18 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).

19 “Belgian Legislators May Consider Call to Lift Anti-Russian Sanctions”, *Sputnik*, 24 July (2016), <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201607241043554261-sanctions-belgium-russia/>.

20 “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/>.



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” sanction<sup>21</sup> and headed the Belgian delegation to Syria in February 2017<sup>22</sup> 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.

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.<sup>23</sup>



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

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/fdwvb/photos/a.7149482952178.77.1073741826.103536906359022/1756681507711212/>

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

22 “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/>.

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

**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.<sup>24</sup> 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 project<sup>25</sup> and CIS-EMO.<sup>26</sup>

French MPs **Louis Aliot, Bruno Bilde, Gilbert Collard** and **Ludovic Pajot**, as well as MEP **Mylène Troszczyński**, 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



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

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

24 Tsvetelia Tsolova, “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-idUSKBN16O1AA>.

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

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

international policies. In September 2017, **Bilde** took part in the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia.

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"<sup>27</sup> and the illegitimate presidential elections in Russia-occupied South Ossetia<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup>

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,<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

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 about Ukraine,<sup>32</sup> as well as attacking mainstream French media accusing them of "Russophobia".<sup>33</sup>

27 "Bako Sahakyan Receives Maurice Bonnot", *Armenpress*, 19 May (2010), [https://armenpress.am/eng/news/603943/Bako\\_Sahakyan\\_receives\\_Maurice\\_Bonnot.html](https://armenpress.am/eng/news/603943/Bako_Sahakyan_receives_Maurice_Bonnot.html).

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

29 "17 parlementaires français se rendent à Moscou", *Sputnik*, 16 December (2015), <https://fr.sputniknews.com/international/201512161020327053-mariani-dialogue-france-russie/>.

30 "V Pridnestrov'ye pribyla mezhdunarodnaya gruppa yuristov".

31 "Ekspertny sovet".

32 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](http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2014/10/24/les-trolls-du-kremlin-au-service-de-la-propagande_1129062).

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



*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](https://twitter.com/Frohnmaier_AfD/status/975343740935114752)

**Alesya Miloradovich** co-organised an illegal trip of 22 children from France to Russia-annexed Crimea in August 2016<sup>34</sup> 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 Ukraine<sup>35</sup> and, in April in 2016, he took

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

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

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.<sup>36</sup>

German priest **Cyrill Pech**, the last president of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship, publicly justified the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014.<sup>37</sup>

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 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.



*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/97\\_5282155248025600](https://twitter.com/gmatteoferrari/status/97_5282155248025600)

36 “V Germanii proshla konferentsiya protiv rusofobii i za solidarnost’ s Donbassom”, *Tsargrad*, [https://tsargrad.tv/news/v-germanii-proshla-konferentsiya-protiv-rusofobii-i-za-solidarnost-s-donbassom\\_48576](https://tsargrad.tv/news/v-germanii-proshla-konferentsiya-protiv-rusofobii-i-za-solidarnost-s-donbassom_48576).

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

**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", 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 Sapetini", 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 Issaikai 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.<sup>38</sup> In September that year, **Kimura** observed the illegitimate "regional elections" in Crimea.<sup>39</sup>

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

38 "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>.

39 "Nablyudatel' iz Yaponii schitaet vybory v Krymu otkrytymi i demokraticnymi", *TASS*, 13 September (2015), <http://tass.ru/politika/2258176>.

Šešelj visited the “Donetsk People’s Republic” to express their support for its pro-Russian struggle.<sup>40</sup>

**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 sanctions against Russia.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> **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

40 “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>.

41 “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/>.

42 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/>.



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

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

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 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.<sup>43</sup> 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

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43 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>.



“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 – 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.<sup>44</sup>

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.<sup>45</sup>

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 to observe the

44 “Rezultaty vyborov annulirovany na semi uchastkakh”, *OTR*, 19 March (2018), <https://otr-online.ru/news/resultaty-vyborov-annulirovani-100589.html>.

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

## 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- kontroliruyut-v-kaluge-vybory-prezidenta-rf.html>

agency reported that “Council of Europe” observers Sergey Lushch, Milovan Peulić and Alexandar Tikhomirov Simov commended the electoral process in the Tula region.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup>

Russian presidential election as part of the OSCE mission.<sup>46</sup> On the day of the election, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* misrepresented Alain Marleix, Jean Cadet, Denis Jacquat and other non-affiliated monitors as “OSCE observers.”<sup>47</sup> *Biyskiy rabochiy* pulled the same trick with Maurice Bonnot and Véronique Rouez.<sup>48</sup> 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

46 “V Mosoblizbirkome sostoyalas’ vstrecha s predstavitelnyami Missii nablyudateley (OBSE) na vyborah Prezidenta Rossii”, *Vestnik izbiratel’noy komissii Moskovskoy oblasti*, 17 March (2018), [http://www.izbirkommo.ru/novosti/?ELEMENT\\_ID=86058](http://www.izbirkommo.ru/novosti/?ELEMENT_ID=86058).

47 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>.

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

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

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

Finally, one of the standard questions that “*Rossiia 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, “*Rossiia 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 “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.<sup>51</sup>

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.

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51 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>.

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” (Vasily 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 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.







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- 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*)

