

Politically Biased Foreign Electoral Observation at the Russian 2018 Presidential Election

Report by 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.¹ However, as Levichev stated, the OSCE withdrew several short-term observers, and, on the day of the election, 1513 foreign observers from 115 countries monitored the Russian presidential election.²

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

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

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

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.

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
Superior Electoral Tribunal of Paraguay	2
National Electoral Commission of Poland	2
National Election Commission of South Korea	8
National Electoral Council of Ecuador	2
Electoral Commission of South Africa	1
Delegation of observers from China	5
State Duma of the Federal Assembly of Russia	318
Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of Russia	164
TOTAL	1513

Sources:

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

<https://iz.ru/721447/angelina-galanina-natalia-portiakova-dmitrii-laru-tatiana-baikova/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.³ (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”.⁴ 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”.⁵

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.

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>.

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

Individual foreign observers at the 2018 Russian presidential election

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

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

Table 2. Identified foreign observers invited by the Federation Assembly at the Russian presidential election (excluding Russia-annexed Crimea)⁶

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation	Region/city of observation
	Argentina	Fernando Riva Mendoza	*unknown	Perm
	Argentina	Pablo Vilas	“La Cámpora” organisation	Krasnodar
	Armenia	Lilit Beglaryan	Republican Party of Armenia	Yekaterinburg
	Armenia	Vardan Khachatryan	*unknown	Yaroslavl
	Austria	Stefan Karner	*unknown	Vologda
	Austria	Zeljko Malesevic	Freedom Party of Austria	Omsk
	Belarus	Sergey Lushch	“Young Russia” movement	Tula
	Belgium	Aldo Carcaci	People’s Party	Moscow
	Belgium	Philip Dewinter	Flemish Interest	Moscow
	Belgium	Philippe Chansay Wilmotte	*unknown	Vladikavkaz
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Staša Košarac	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats	Moscow
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Milovan Peulić	Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining of the Republic of Srpska	Tula
	Brazil	Devanir Cavalcante de Lima	*unknown	Krasnoyarsk
	Bulgaria	Ivaylo Dinev	dVERSIA website	Voronezh
	Bulgaria	Vanya Dobрева	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Novosibirsk
	Bulgaria	Nikolay Draganov	*unknown	Vologda
	Bulgaria	Mirena Filipova	*unknown	Vologda
	Bulgaria	Pencho Plamenov Milkov	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Vladikavkaz
	Bulgaria	Kaloyan Pargov	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Novosibirsk
	Bulgaria	Lora Radeva	*unknown	*unknown
	Bulgaria	Svetlana Sharenkova	Bulgarian Socialist Party	St. Petersburg

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>.

	Bulgaria	Alexandar Tikhomirov Simov	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Tula
	Bulgaria	Bojan Stanisławski	Strajk.eu website	Vologda
	Bulgaria	Irena Todorova Anastasova	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Vladikavkaz
	China	Pan Dawei	Russia and Central Asia Research Center, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences	Smolensk
	China	Shen Guomin	Shanghai People's Congress	Smolensk
	China	Shao Ning	<i>Xinmin Wanbao</i> newspaper	Smolensk
	China	Qian Xiao-Yun	Shanghai Institutes for International Studies	Smolensk
	China	Li Yihai	Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences	Smolensk
	China	Li Yongquan	Institute of Russian, Eastern European & Central Asian Studies	Smolensk
	Congo	Patrick Nkanga Bekonda	Youth League of the People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy	Yaroslavl
	Costa Rica	Ernesto Jiménez Morales	Costa Rica Trade and Tourism Chamber	Samara
	Czech Republic	Jaromír Kohlíček	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	Krasnodar
	Egypt	Abdel Rahim Ali	Al Bawba News website, Middle East Studies Centre	*unknown
	France	Louis Aliot	National Front	*unknown
	France	Bruno Bilde	National Front	*unknown
	France	Maurice Bonnot	Institute of Democracy and Cooperation	Altay
	France	Yves Pozzo di Borgo	Union of Democrats and Independents, French-Russian Dialogue Association	*unknown
	France	Patrick Brunot	*unknown	Altay
	France	Jean Cadet	French-Russian Dialogue Association	Kaluga
	France	Gilbert Collard	National Front	Krasnodar
	France	Joël Guerriau	The Republicans	Vladimir
	France	Elie Hatem	Action Française	*unknown
	France	Denis Jacquat	The Republicans	Kaluga
	France	Dimitri de Kochko	*unknown	*unknown
	France	Thierry Mariani	The Republicans	Moscow
	France	Alain Marleix	The Republicans	Kaluga
	France	Alesya Miloradovich	*unknown	Altay
	France	Ludovic Pajot	National Front	*unknown
	France	Véronique Rouez	*unknown	Altay
	France	Mylène Troszczyński	National Front	Krasnodar
	France	Jean-Michel Vernochet	*unknown	Altay
	Germany	Wilfried Bergmann	German-Russian Forum	Saratov

	Germany	Alexander Von Bismarck	Christian Democratic Union of Germany	Krasnodar
	Germany	Hans-Wilhelm Dünn	Cyber-Sicherheitsrat Deutschland e.V.	Krasnodar
	Germany	Dietmar Friedhoff	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
	Germany	Anton Friesen	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
	Germany	Markus Frohnmaier	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
	Germany	Waldemar Herdt	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
	Germany	Steffen Kotré	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
	Germany	Cyrell Pech	*unknown	Nizhniy Novgorod
	Germany	Robby Schlund	Alternative for Germany	*unknown
	Greece	Maria Antoniou	New Democracy	Yaroslavl
	India	Sunil Ambekar	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad organisation	*unknown
	India	Ashok Modak	University of Mumbai	Tver
	India	Obaidur Rahaman	Jawaharlal Nehru University	*unknown
	India	Monish Tourangbam	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	Velikiy Novgorod
	Iran	Izanlu Hassan Abdollali ⁷	*unknown	Pskov
	Ireland	Tom Kitt	Fianna Fáil	Moscow
	Italy	Fabrizio Bertot	Forza Italia	Moscow
	Italy	Claudio D'Amico	Northern League	Moscow
	Italy	Gianmatteo Ferrari	Northern League	Moscow
	Italy	Gian Luigi Ferretti	General Labour Union	Tver
	Italy	Stefano Maullu	Forza Italia	*unknown
	Italy	Alessandro Musolino	Forza Italia	Leningrad region
	Italy	Fabio Pasinetti	Oltre la linea website	Nizhniy Novgorod
	Italy	Gianluca Savoini	Northern League	Moscow
	Japan	Mitsuhiro Kimura	Issuikai movement	Syktyvkar
	Jordan	Haleb Hasan	*unknown	Moscow
	Kazakhstan	Bakhytzhan Zhumagulov	"Nur Otan" Democratic People's Party	*unknown
	Latvia	Andrejs Mamikins	Social Democratic Party "Harmony"	*unknown
	Latvia	Miroslavs Mitrofanovs	Latvian Russian Union	*unknown
	Latvia	Tatjana Ždanoka	Latvian Russian Union	*unknown
	Lebanon	Nabil Nicolas	Change and Reform bloc	*unknown
	Lebanon	Imad Rizk	*unknown	Pskov
	Mali	Oumar Mariko	African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence	*unknown
	Mongolia	Ninj Demberel	Mongolian People's Party	Perm
	Mongolia	Danzan Luzhedanzan	*unknown	*unknown
	Netherlands	Jan Herman Brinks	*unknown	Moscow
	Pakistan	Zahid Hamid	Pakistan Muslim League	*unknown
	Palestine	Nabil Shaath	*unknown	Moscow
	Paraguay	Humberto Paredes	National Youth Secretariat	Yaroslavl
	Poland	Dimitris Dimitriadis	*unknown	Tver

⁷ This name was transliterated from Russian.

	Poland	Małgorzata Kulbaczevska-Figat	Strajk.eu website	Tver
	Poland	Maciej Wiśniowski	Strajk.eu website, Sputnik Polska	Tver
	Portugal	Duarte Pacheco	Social Democratic Party	Moscow
	Serbia	Veroljub Arsić	Serbian Progressive Party	Moscow
	Serbia	Dušan Bajatović	Srbijagas	Leningrad region
	Serbia	Dubravko Bojić	Serbian Radical Party	*unknown
	Serbia	Milovan Drecun	Serbian Progressive Party	*unknown
	Serbia	Vladimir Đukanović	Serbian Progressive Party	*unknown
	Serbia	Miloš Đurin	Democratic Party of Serbia	Perm
	Serbia	Vesna Ivković	Socialist Party of Serbia	*unknown
	Serbia	Dragana Odović	Serbian Progressive Party	*unknown
	Serbia	Ognjen Pantović	Serbian People's Party	Voronezh
	Serbia	Lazar Popović	Serbian People's Party	Voronezh
	Serbia	Mladen Savić	Democratic Party of Serbia	Voronezh
	Serbia	Aleksandar Šešelj	Serbian Radical Party	*unknown
	Serbia	Danijela Stojadinović	Socialist Party of Serbia	*unknown
	Singapore	Rupakjyoti Borah	National University of Singapore	Tver
	Slovakia	Ján Čarnogurský	Slovak-Russian association	Yaroslavl
	Slovakia	Marek Krajčí	Ordinary People and Independent Personalities	Saratov
	Spain	Pedro Agramunt	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)	*unknown
	Spain	Borja de Arístegui	Lebanese International University	Krasnogorsk
	Spain	Pedro Mouriño	IberAtlantic Global Corporation	Moscow
	Spain	Jordi Xuclà i Costa	Catalan European Democratic Party	*unknown
	South Africa	Archibold Jomo Nyambi	African National Congress	*unknown
	Sweden	Sanna Hill	Free West Media website	Moscow
	Sweden	Vavra Suk	<i>Nya Tider</i> magazine, Free West Media website	Moscow
	Switzerland	Emmanuel Kilchenmann	Kilchenmann & Co.	*unknown
	Syria	Samir Nasir	National Council of Syria	*unknown
	Turkey	Sedat Kara	Istanbul Commerce University	Novosibirsk
	United Kingdom	Janice Atkinson	Europe of Nations and Freedom group	*unknown
	USA	G. Kline Preston IV	Kline Preston Law Group	Vladimir
	USA	Elie Rubinstein	Emergency USA	Moscow

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

Slutsky's second role was that of an intermediary – sometimes via deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Aleksey Chepa – between, on the one hand, Volodin and Umakhanov, and, on the other, several Russian organisations that invited individual international

observers. These organisations include, but are not limited to, (1) CIS-EMO/Public Diplomacy headed by Aleksey Kochetkov and Stanislav Byshok; (2) the “Civic Control” Association headed by Aleksandr Brod; and (3) the National Social Monitoring (NSM) headed by Alexander Zakuskin.

These and, highly likely, other facilitating agencies contacted potential international observers, sent them application forms and then forwarded those forms to Slutsky or Chepa who then passed them to Volodin and Umakhanov who signed official invitations required to either to obtain Russian visas or justify their entry into Russia during the border control. According to the statements from CIS-EMO and “Civic Control”, their organisations invited 24⁸ and around 20⁹ foreign observers respectively. At the moment, it is unknown how many foreign observers were invited by the NSM or any other facilitating agency.

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



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

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

⁸ “Missiya nezavisimyykh nablyudateley na vyborakh Prezidenta RF”, *Public Diplomacy*, 4 April (2018), <http://www.publicdiplomacy.su/2018/04/04/missiya-nezavisimyykh-nablyudateley-na-vyborakh-prezidenta-rf/>.

⁹ “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>.

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”.¹⁰ 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”.¹¹

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”.¹² (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”.¹³ These and other similar statements reflect an obvious resentment – on the part of certain Russian electoral monitoring organisations closely working with the Russian authorities – about the internationally recognised credibility and reputation of the OSCE/ODIHR.

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;

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ Nicu Popescu, “Russia’s Soft Power Ambitions”, *CEPS Policy Brief*, No. 115 (2006), p. 2.

¹² “Itogi raboty missii mezhdunarodnykh nablyudateley na vyborakh Prezidenta RF”, *Rossia segodnya*, 19 March (2018), <http://pressmia.ru/pressclub/20180319/951895487.html>.

¹³ “Vybory v Rossii. Ekspert: Oranzhevaya revolyutsiya – eto udel sytykh, udel sytoy intelligentsia”, *Stolichnoe teletvidenie*, 4 March (2012), <http://www.ctv.by/новости/выборы-в-россии-эксперт-оранжевая-революция-—-это-удел-сытых-удел-сытой-интеллигенции>.



- 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,¹⁴ although the OSCE/ODIHR concluded that “the conditions necessary for a meaningful democratic election were not established” in Azerbaijan.¹⁵ In March 2017, **Agramunt**, as PACE president, travelled to Syria – together with **Jordi Xuclà i Costa**¹⁶ – 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.

French former MP **Thierry Mariani** 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. **Mariani** is the head of the openly pro-Kremlin French-Russian Dialogue Association, the members of which include Leonid Slutsky. In April 2015, Slutsky brought **Mariani** to Moscow who would say that the “anti-Russian” sanctions had to be lifted. In July 2015, **Mariani** illegally travelled to Crimea as part of a larger French delegation.¹⁷ **Mariani**'s both trips (to Russia and Crimea) were fully funded by the Russian Peace Foundation (RPF) headed by Slutsky.¹⁸ In December 2015, **Mariani** led a delegation of 17 French politicians to Moscow, also upon the invitation from the RPF. Moreover, he participated in electoral observation missions organised by Kochetkov's CIS-EMO.

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

¹⁴ “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/.

¹⁵ “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>.

¹⁶ “El PPE retira su confianza a Agramunt por su viaje a Siria”, *Levante*, 26 June (2017), <http://www.levante-emv.com/comunitat-valenciana/2017/06/26/ppe-retira-confianza-agramunt-viaje/1585710.html>.

¹⁷ 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>.

¹⁸ “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>.

Zeljko Malešević is a member of the Austrian far-right Freedom Party that has been involved in various pro-Kremlin activities since at least 2008,¹⁹ 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”.



Belgian observer from the far-right Flemish Interest party Philip Dewinter (left) and Leonid Slutsky. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/fdwvb/photos/a.714948295217877.1073741826.103536906359022/1756681507711212/>

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.²⁰ 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.²¹ In September that year, **Carcaci** was part of the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia. In January 2018, he participated in the presentation of the “Yalta International Economic Forum” organised by Jaromír Kohlíček in the European Parliament.

A member of the Flemish parliament and one of the leading members of the far-right Flemish Interest party **Philip Dewinter** called for lifting of the “anti-Russian” sanctions²² and headed the Belgian delegation to Syria in February 2017.²³ 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.²⁴

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

¹⁹ 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).

²⁰ “Belgian Legislators May Consider Call to Lift Anti-Russian Sanctions”, *Sputnik*, 24 July (2016), <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201607241043554261-sanctions-belgium-russia/>.

²¹ “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/>.

²² “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/>.

²³ “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/>.

²⁴ “V Pridnestrov’ye pribyla mezhdunarodnaya gruppya yuristov”, *Press Obozrenie*, 10 May (2007), <https://press.try.md/item.php?id=84419>.

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.²⁵ 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 project²⁶ and CIS-EMO.²⁷



Polish observers **Małgorzata Kulbaczewska-Figat** (left) and **Maciej Wiśniowski** (right). Source: <http://tver.spravedlivo.ru/005155428.html>

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

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”²⁸ and the illegitimate presidential elections in Russia-occupied South Ossetia²⁹ 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 2015.³⁰

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.

²⁵ Tsvetelia Tsołova, “Socialists Say Bulgaria Pays High Price for EU’s Russia Sanctions”, *Reuters*, 17 March (2017), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-election-socialists/socialists-say-bulgaria-pays-high-price-for-eus-russia-sanctions-idUSKBN16O1AA>.

²⁶ “Ekspertny sovet”, *Public Diplomacy*, 18 March (2015), <http://www.publicdiplomacy.su/ekspertnyiy-sovet/>.

²⁷ “Uchastniki”, *CIS-EMO*, <http://www.cis-emo.net/ru/uchastniki>.

²⁸ “Bako Sahakyan Receives Maurice Bonnot”, *Armenpress*, 19 May (2010), https://armenpress.am/eng/news/603943/Bako_Sahakyan_receives_Maurice_Bonnot.html.

²⁹ “Konsul’tant Evropeyskogo instituta demokratii i sotrudnishstva: vybory glavy Yuzhnoy Osetii prokhodyat demokratchno”, *Ekho Kavkaza*, 27 November (2011), <https://www.ekhoavkaza.com/a/24403742.html>.

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

Together with Philippe Chansay Wilmotte, **Brunot** participated in the CIS-EMO mission in Transnistria in 2007,³¹ 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.³²

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,³³ as well as attacking mainstream French media accusing them of "Russophobia".³⁴

Alesya Miloradovich co-organised an illegal trip of 22 children from France to Russia-annexed Crimea in August 2016³⁵ 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.



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

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 Ukraine³⁶ and, in April in 2016, he took part in the Second Yalta International Economic Forum

³¹ "V Pridnestrov'ye pribyla mezhdunarodnaya gruppa yuristov".

³² "Ekspertny sovet".

³³ 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.

³⁴ "French Media Obsessed With Russophobic Propaganda – Journalist", *Sputnik*, 23 August (2015), <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201508231026084221-french-media-promotes-russophobia/>.

³⁵ "French Authorities Denied Help to Kids Travelling to Crimea's Artek Camp", *Sputnik*, 27 August (2016), <https://sputniknews.com/russia/201608261044676473-france-kids-crimea/>.

³⁶ "Cultural Exchange between Germany and Donbass", *NRT 24*, 14 May (2016), <http://nrt24.ru/en/cultural-exchange-between-germany-and-donbass>.

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.³⁷

German priest **Cyrill Pech**, the last president of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship, publicly justified the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014.³⁸

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.

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 Sapettini”, a supportive book on the relations between the Northern League and Putin’s Russia.

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

The leader of the Japanese far-right 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



Italian observer from the far-right Northern League Gianmatteo Ferrari (right) and Vladimir Putin’s Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov (left). Source: <https://twitter.com/gmatteoferrari/status/975282155248025600>

³⁷ “V Germanii proshla konferentsiya protiv rusofobii i za solidarnost’ s Donbassom”, *Tsargrad*, https://tsargrad.tv/news/v-germanii-proshla-konferencija-protiv-rusofobii-i-za-solidarnost-s-donbassom_48576.

³⁸ “Offener Brief an Präsident Putin”, *Sputnik*, 31 March (2014), <https://de.sputniknews.com/leserbriefe/20140331268146070-Offener-Brief-an-Prsident-Putin/>.

the Russian occupying forces.³⁹ In September that year, **Kimura** observed the illegitimate “regional elections” in Crimea.⁴⁰

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

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

Dubravko Bojić and **Aleksandar Šešelj** are members of the far-right, pro-Kremlin Serbian Radical Party. In March 2017, **Bojić** and **Šešelj** illegally visited Russia-annexed Crimea together with some other European politicians. In May the same year, **Bojić** and **Šešelj** visited the “Donetsk People’s Republic” to express their support for its pro-Russian struggle.⁴¹

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.⁴² **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

³⁹ “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>.

⁴⁰ “Nablyudatel’ iz Yaponii schitaet vybory v Krymu otkrytymi i demokraticnymi”, *TASS*, 13 September (2015), <http://tass.ru/politika/2258176>.

⁴¹ “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>.

⁴² “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/>.

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.⁴³ **Preston** participated in the politically biased electoral observation missions at the 2011 parliamentary elections and 2017 regional elections in Russia.

Foreign electoral observation as an instrument of propaganda and disinformation

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



French far-right electoral observers Louis Aliot (left) and Elie Hatem (right) with Russian ultranationalist presidential candidate Sergey Baburin. Source: <https://twitter.com/SergeyBaburin/status/974915036643807237>

⁴³ 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/>.

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.⁴⁴ Thus, various Russian agencies and offices were involved in attempts to boost the turnout even on the day of the election itself, and one way to do this was to publicise, via Internet and TV reports, favourable comments on the turnout from foreign observers. However, reputable electoral monitoring organisations do not usually comment on different aspects of the electoral process before the voting is over, and, as a rule, they provide preliminary results of their observation the day after the election. It is exactly for this reason Russian media turned to "Federation Assembly observers" as they were not part of any established electoral monitoring organisation and were not limited by the common rules of electoral observation.

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

2. There were several cases where comments from "Federation Assembly observers" were used to relativise or neutralise criticism of the electoral process. For example, when reporting on the annulment of the electoral results in seven polling stations because of various irregularities, a report by the government-founded Public Television of Russia first cited the CEC's chairwoman Ella Pamfilova who commented on the reasons of the annulment, then Michael Georg Link who led the short-term OSCE observer mission and commented on the lack of real political competition, and finally – to relativise Links' criticism – 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.⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶

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.

⁴⁴ 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>.

⁴⁵ "Rezultaty vyborov annulirovany na semi uchastkakh", *OTR*, 19 March (2018), <https://otr-online.ru/news/rezultati-vyborov-annulirovani-100589.html>.

⁴⁶ Aleksey Petrov, "Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli ne zafiksirovali ser'oznykh narusheniy na vyborakh v RF", *Vesti*, 19 March (2018), <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2997166&tid=111203>.

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>

region.⁵⁰ 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 2014.⁵¹

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

There might be yet another, fourth, reason for inviting those observers to Russia: the expansion of the pro-Kremlin network in the West and other parts of the world. In previous years, some foreign politicians, activists and experts who came to observe elections in Russia and the post-Soviet space as

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 Russian presidential election as part of the OSCE mission.⁴⁷ On the day of the election, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* misrepresented Alain Marleix, Jean Cadet, Denis Jacquat and other non-affiliated monitors as "OSCE observers".⁴⁸ *Biyskiy rabochiy* pulled the same trick with Maurice Bonnot and Véronique Rouez.⁴⁹ These cases of misrepresentation aimed at disinforming the Russian audience about the real assessment of the electoral process by the OSCE/ODIHR mission.

Surprisingly, another victim of misrepresentation and disinformation was PACE: the Interfax news agency reported that "Council of Europe" observers Sergey Lushch, Milovan Peulić and Alexandar Tikhomirov Simov commended the electoral process in the Tula

⁴⁷ "V Mosoblizbirkome sostoyalas' vstrecha s predstavitel'yami Missii nablyudateley (OBSE) na vyborah Prezidenta Rossii", *Vestnik izbiratel'noy komissii Moskovskoy oblasti*, 17 March (2018), http://www.izbirkommo.ru/novosti/?ELEMENT_ID=86058.

⁴⁸ 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>.

⁴⁹ "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>.

⁵⁰ "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>.

⁵¹ "Rossiya ne priglasit nablyudateley PASE na prezidentskie vybory", *NTV*, 11 January (2018), <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1970473/>.



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.⁵²

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

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

⁵² 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>.



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.