

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

Report by Anton Shekhovtsov



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

## Executive summary

- Due to the fact that the Cambodian authorities banned the main opposition party in 2017, Western states declined to send any observers to monitor the parliamentary elections in Cambodia held on 29 July 2018. On the contrary, for the first time since 2002, Western institutions sent several missions to monitor the elections in Zimbabwe that were held on 30 July 2018 following the coup d'état in 2017.
- As the Cambodian authorities needed friendly Western voices that would approve of the parliamentary elections, Cambodia's National Election Committee accredited several minor Western missions, including a "senior delegation of the international observers" consisting of around 30 monitors and represented predominantly by European and American politicians, that were coordinated and seemingly guided by the Cambodian, pro-government Civil Society Alliance Forum.

- While there was no lack of Western monitoring of the elections in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission accredited a mission of the little known and shady organisation called Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC) that sent around 40 observers – some of them were from European countries – to monitor the Zimbabwean elections.
- The “senior delegation of the international observers” (in the Cambodian case) and the AFRIC’s observation mission (in the Zimbabwean case) offered positive – and sometimes clearly politically charged – assessments of the elections in both countries, and their statements were widely disseminated by the state-controlled media to give an impression of overwhelming Western satisfaction with the conduct of the elections.
- Neither the “senior delegation of the international observers”, nor the AFRIC’s mission was transparent about the principles or methodologies they employed for observing the election processes in Cambodia or Zimbabwe. They did not comply with the “Code of Conduct for International Election Observers” endorsed by all relevant international election observation organisations including ODIHR/OSCE which states that “international election observation missions must be of sufficient size to “determine independently and impartially the character of election processes in a country and must be of sufficient duration to determine the character of all of the critical elements of the election process in the pre-election, election-day and post-election period.”
- Many of the members of the “senior delegation of the international observers” in Cambodia and the AFRIC’s observation mission in Zimbabwe have a history of involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts that include, but are not limited to: (1) previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions; (2) legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine); (3) criticism of the EU European sanctions imposed on Russia; (4) cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.); and (5) disseminating pro-Kremlin narratives on social media (Facebook).
- The mission of the “senior delegation of the international observers” in Cambodia was directly coordinated by several Russian actors, in particular, by Aleksey Chepa, deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, and Oleg Bondarenko, Director of the Foundation for Progressive Policy that is engaged in advancing the Kremlin’s foreign policy interests in Europe.
- While there has been no evidence so far that Russian officials or experts were directly involved in coordinating the AFRIC’s mission in Zimbabwe, it is important to note that the head of the mission, Jose Matemulane, studied in several Russian universities from 2002 until 2012, disseminates pro-Kremlin propaganda on the social networks and maintains contacts with various Russian actors.

## **Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections: background**

On 29 July 2018, Cambodia held general elections to elect 125 members of the National Assembly, the lower house of the Parliament of Cambodia. The elections took place against the background of the absence to the genuine opposition to the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) led by Prime Minister Hun Sen who had governed the country since November 1998.<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Ben Sokhean, "Breaking: Supreme Court Rules to Dissolve CNRP", *The Phnom Penh Post*, 16 November (2017), <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/breaking-supreme-court-rules-dissolve-cnrp>.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Kocijancic, "Statement by the Spokesperson on the General Elections in Cambodia", *European Union External Action*, 30 July (2018), [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/48957/Statement%20by%20the%20Spokesperson%20on%20the%20general%20elections%20in%20Cambodia](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/48957/Statement%20by%20the%20Spokesperson%20on%20the%20general%20elections%20in%20Cambodia).

<sup>4</sup> "Statement from the Press Secretary on Cambodia's Flawed Parliamentary Elections", *The White House*, 29 July (2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-cambodias-flawed-parliamentary-elections/>.

<sup>5</sup> David Boyle, "Cambodia Set to Become One-party State", *Voice of America*, 30 July (2018), <https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-set-to-become-one-party-state/4505567.html>.

### **International observation of the Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections**

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

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

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

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

Name	Head of delegation
ASEAN <sup>8</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Assembly	*unknown
Asian Parliamentary Assembly <sup>9</sup>	Ali Khorram
Asian Youth Council	*unknown
Centrist Asia Pacific Democrats International	Agung Laksono

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

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

<sup>8</sup> ASEAN stands for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

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

Centrist Democrat International	Andrés Pastrana Arango
Committee for ASEAN Youth Cooperation	*unknown
International Conference of Asian Political Parties	Jose de Venecia
Shanghai Cooperation Organisation	*unknown
Society International	*unknown
Volunteers Observers for the Cambodian Election	Tony Kevin

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

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

**Table 3. The “senior delegation of the international observers”.<sup>12</sup>**

No.	Name	Country	Affiliation
1.	Marat Amankulov	Kyrgyzstan	Member of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan
2.	Luca Bellotti	Italy	Ex-undersecretary of state at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies
3.	Fabrizio Bertot	Italy	Forward Italy
4.	Oleg Bondarenko	Russia	Director, Foundation for Progressive Policy
5.	Valerio Cignetti	Italy	Tricolour Flame
6.	Liana Davtyan <sup>13</sup>	Armenia	*unknown
7.	Andrea Delmastro Delle Vedove	Italy	Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Brothers of Italy
8.	Gian Luigi Ferretti	Italy	General Labour Union
9.	Rodrigo Do Val Ferreira	Brazil	Landless Workers’ Movement

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

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

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

<sup>13</sup> Liana Davtyan is a spouse of Armen Rustamyan.

10.	Sylvie Goddyn <sup>14</sup>	France	Member of the European Parliament, National Rally
11.	Jaroslav Holík	Czech Republic	Member of the Czech Parliament, Freedom and Direct Democracy
12.	Johannes Hübner	Austria	Freedom Party of Austria
13.	Irina Karamushkina	Kyrgyzstan	Member of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan
14.	Axel Kassegger	Austria	Member of the Austrian Parliament, Freedom Party of Austria
15.	Maurizio Marrone	Italy	Member of the regional parliament of Piedmont, Brothers of Italy
16.	Alessandro Musolino	Italy	Forward Italy
17.	Elias Myriantous	Cyprus	Member of the Cypriot Parliament, <a href="#">Movement for Social Democracy</a>
18.	Angela Myoseos Myriantous <sup>15</sup>	Cyprus	*unknown
19.	Momchil Nekov	Bulgaria	Member of the European Parliament, Bulgarian Socialist Party
20.	Kirill Prokopov	Russia	Just Russia
21.	Maria Proto	Italy	*unknown
22.	Zoran Radojičić	Serbia	Member of the Serbian Parliament, <a href="#">Dveri</a>
23.	Antonio Razzi	Italy	Forward Italy
24.	Luca Romagnoli	Italy	Social Right/Brothers of Italy
25.	Armen Rustamyan	Armenia	Member of the Armenian Parliament, Armenian Revolutionary Federation
26.	Alexandar Seselj	Serbia	Member of the Serbian Parliament, Serbian Radical Party
27.	Aleksei Tikhomirov	Russia	Just Russia
28.	Bogdan Țirdea	Moldova	Member of the Moldovan Parliament, Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
29.	Mariya Vasilyeva	Russia	*unknown
30.	Richard Wood	UK	United Kingdom Independence Party
31.	Vasiliy Zadnepryany	Belarus	Chairman, Republican Party of Labour and Justice

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

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

<sup>15</sup> Angela Myoseos Myriantous is a spouse of Elias Myriantous.

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

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

One Cambodian source claimed<sup>16</sup> that Ericksen headed a delegation of four members of the US Republican Party that arrived in Cambodia to observe the parliamentary elections: Ericksen, Buys, Drew MacEwen and Brandon Vick. However, after the four delegates met with the US Ambassador to Cambodia who voiced the official US concerns about the nature of the elections, MacEwen and Vick declined to observe the elections, while Ericksen and Buys continued their mission.<sup>17</sup>

#### ***Assessments of the Cambodian 2018 parliamentary elections by Western international observers***

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

**Andrés Pastrana Arango**, chairman of the Centrist Democrat International affiliated with the European People’s Party and National Democratic Institute, said that he believed that the elections could be considered “legitimate”.<sup>19</sup> US Senator **Douglas Ericksen** described the Cambodian parliamentary elections as “amazingly transparent” and “incredibly well conducted”.<sup>20</sup> **Andrea Delmastro**, an Italian MP representing the far-right Brothers of Italy party, said that he found “no anomalies [...] in the voting procedures”.<sup>21</sup> According to **Fabrizio Bertot**, a member of the Italian centre-right “Forward Italy” party and a former MEP, “the elections took place in a peaceful and joyful atmosphere”.<sup>22</sup> The impression of

<sup>16</sup> Sophirom, “Four U.S Senators Arrive in Cambodia”.

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

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

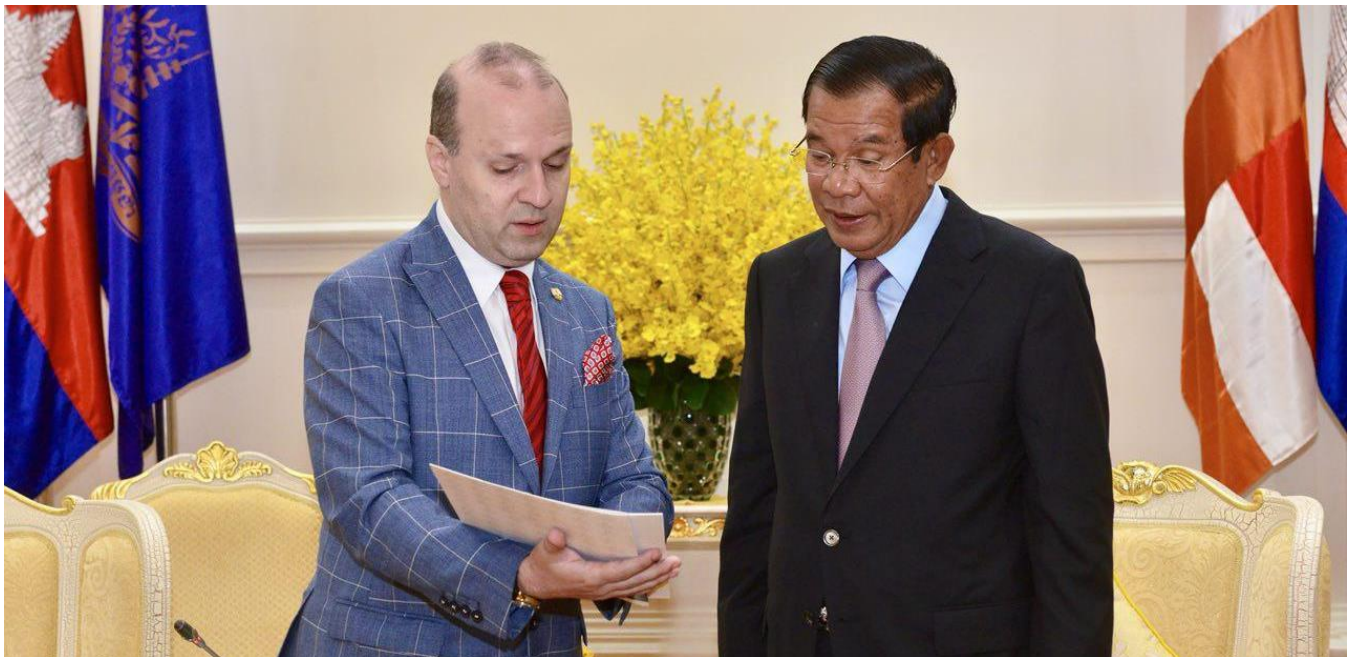
<sup>19</sup> “Millions of Cambodians Vote in Elections without Main Opposition Party”, *Agencia EFE*, 29 July (2018), <https://www.efe.com/efe/english/portada/millions-of-cambodians-vote-in-elections-without-main-opposition-party/50000260-3705070>.

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

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

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

**Axel Kassegger**, an Austrian MP from the far-right Freedom Party of Austria, was that “the election process [was] very professional, smooth and calm. Everything [was] looking okay in my opinion”.<sup>23</sup> **Jaroslav Holík**, a Czech MP from the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party stated that the 2018 parliamentary elections were “very well organized”.<sup>24</sup> **Momchil Nekov**, a Bulgarian MEP from the Bulgarian Socialist Party, claimed that “the counting process was transparent in response to the wishes of the Cambodian people. The great number of voters, more than 80%, legitimatises the democratic election of the 6th legislature”.<sup>25</sup> **Alessandro Musolino**, a member of the “Forward Italy” party “expressed his satisfaction with the organization and the open participation in the elections as a symbol of transparency”.<sup>26</sup> A Romanian individual **Anton Caragea**, who runs a website called “European Council on Tourism and Trade”, gives himself sham “OSCE awards”<sup>27</sup> and refers to himself as “President Professor Dr. Anton Caragea”, declared – on behalf of the non-existent “International Election Monitoring Team” – that the parliamentary elections were “free and fair”.<sup>28</sup> The same conclusion was voiced by **Richard Wood**, a member of the British far-right UKIP.<sup>29</sup>



**Anton Caragea, Hun Sen.**

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

Asked whether they thought that the absence of the CNRP in the electoral process was problematic, many Western observers dismissed the concern. For example, **Antonio Razzi**, a member of the “Forward

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

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

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

<sup>29</sup> Sassoon, “The European Populists”.



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

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

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

Neither the “senior delegation of the international observers”, nor any other Western election observation mission, apart from the Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe, published a report after their observation or presented principles or methodologies that were supposed to guide their monitoring missions. They did not comply with the “Code of Conduct for International Election Observers” endorsed by all relevant international election observation organisations including ODIHR/OSCE, OSCE PA, PACE, European Parliament and others, which states that “international election observation missions must be of sufficient size to “determine independently and impartially the character of election processes in a country and must be of sufficient duration to determine the character of all of the critical elements of the election process in the pre-election, election-day and post-election period.”<sup>35</sup>

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

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

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<sup>30</sup> “Ronald Reagan Institute of Political Studies and Integration”.

<sup>31</sup> Sassoon, “The European Populists”.

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

<sup>33</sup> “Ronald Reagan Institute of Political Studies and Integration”.

<sup>34</sup> Sassoon, “The European Populists”.

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

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

Aleksey Chepa, deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, who led the delegation of the State Duma to observe the Cambodian parliamentary elections, was also one of the coordinators of the group of 482 politically biased international observers at the Russian presidential election.<sup>37</sup> Chepa is also a member of the "Just Russia" party, and two members of this party, namely Kirill Prokopov and Aleksei Tikhomirov, were described – in the Cambodian list of the "senior delegation of the international observers" (see Table 3) – as "group coordinators", and one can surmise that they acted on behalf of Chepa. Moreover, the "Just Russia" party revealed that its membership in the Socialist International, an international association of socialist and social-democratic parties, allowed it to invite politicians from Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Serbia to observe the Cambodian parliamentary elections,<sup>38</sup> and, indeed, representatives from these countries – and predominantly members of socialist/social-democratic parties – are included in the Cambodian list of the "senior delegation of the international observers".

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

Oleg Bondarenko, Director of the Russia-based Foundation for Progressive Policy, is known for advancing Moscow's foreign policy interests in Europe. In 2006-2014, he was an executive director of the Ukraine-based Russian-Ukrainian Information Centre that was founded by Russian far-right politician Dmitry Rogozin and spread Kremlin propaganda in Ukraine. In 2008, upon the invitation from the far-right Serbian Radical Party, Bondarenko organised the first Russian-Serbian Business Forum in Belgrade as an instrument of furthering Russian influence in Serbia. In 2017, he observed the German parliamentary elections, implicitly supporting two German parties, namely The Left (Die Linke) and Alternative for

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

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

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

<sup>39</sup> Sassoon, "The European Populists".

Germany (Alternative für Deutschland), that are friendly towards Moscow.<sup>40</sup> In January, as he was travelling to Germany to take part in a political event organised by The Left party, Bondarenko was denied entry to the Schengen area at Poland’s request.<sup>41</sup>

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

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

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



**Gian Luigi Ferretti, Richard Wood, Alexandar Seselj, Antonio Razzi**  
<http://en.freshnewsasia.com/index.php/en/10421-2018-07-30-10-08-52.html>

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

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

Italian former MEP **Fabrizio Bertot** observed the illegitimate Crimean “referendum” in March 2014 and the illegitimate “parliamentary elections” in the Russia-occupied parts of Eastern Ukraine in November 2014. He was also part of the politically biased international monitoring missions at the Russian regional elections in September 2014 and at the Russian presidential election in March 2018.<sup>42</sup> Bertot is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website and criticised the EU sanctions against Russia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Zimbabwean 2018 elections: background**

On 30 July 2018, Zimbabwe held general elections to elect the president and members of both houses of parliament. The elections were held for the first time since the coup d’état in November 2017 that

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<sup>42</sup> Shekhovtsov, “Politically Biased Foreign Electoral Observation”.

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

ousted President Robert Mugabe who led the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and headed the country for 30 years. After Mugabe’s removal from power, the country was led by Emmerson Mnangagwa, the new leader of the ZANU-PF.

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

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

### ***International observation of the Zimbabwean 2018 elections***

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

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

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

In its preliminary statement, the EU Election Observation Mission concluded that “the elections were competitive, the campaign was largely peaceful and, overall, political freedoms during the campaign,

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

<sup>45</sup> SADC stands for Southern African Development Community.

including freedom of movement, assembly and speech, were respected". At the same time, the EU noted that "the misuse of state resources, instances of coercion and intimidation, partisan behaviour by traditional leaders and overt bias in state media, all in favour of the ruling party, meant that a truly level playing field was not yet achieved, which negatively impacted on the democratic character of the electoral environment".<sup>46</sup>

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

Non-Western election observation missions, however, were much less critical. For example, the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries "congratulated Zimbabwe and its various political parties on the manner in which they conducted themselves during the 2018 electoral period", while the head of the mission, Semistocles Kaijage, said that "a spirit of tolerance and restraint [had been] prevalent during the campaign period".<sup>48</sup>

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

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<sup>46</sup> "Preliminary Statement", *European Union Election Observation Mission*, 1 August (2018), [https://cdn3-eeas.fpfis.tech.ec.europa.eu/cdn/farfuture/klv-gpv2wEwF18kSrJmmoREr4XmRSK0JNGDCBCWKclk/mtime:1533137724/sites/eeas/files/010818ps\\_-\\_eu\\_eom\\_zimbabwe.pdf](https://cdn3-eeas.fpfis.tech.ec.europa.eu/cdn/farfuture/klv-gpv2wEwF18kSrJmmoREr4XmRSK0JNGDCBCWKclk/mtime:1533137724/sites/eeas/files/010818ps_-_eu_eom_zimbabwe.pdf).

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

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

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

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

## Assessments of the Zimbabwean 2018 parliamentary elections by the AFRIC

The AFRIC claims that, to observe the elections in Zimbabwe, it dispatched 43 observers from across the world, namely from countries such as Cape Verde, Germany, Mongolia, Mozambique, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine.<sup>52</sup> The AFRIC did not publish the full list of its observers and also did not respond to the request of the author of this report to provide such a list. Nevertheless, we have identified 17 observers of the AFRIC observation mission that monitored the Zimbabwean elections, see Table 6. According to its website, the AFRIC's observers arrived in Zimbabwe "several days prior to the election";<sup>53</sup> at least three of AFRIC's observers checked-in from non-Zimbabwean airports on Facebook on 26 July,<sup>54</sup> so they could not have arrived in Harare more than five days before the voting day.

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

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

The AFRIC describes itself as "a community of independent researchers, experts and activists", and its declared goals are: "creating a platform for elaboration and dissemination of objective analytical

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

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

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

information, first-hand opinions” and “establishing direct communication and cooperation”.<sup>55</sup> It is also a shady organisation: it is impossible to establish who founded it and when. The AFRIC’s website was registered on 13 April 2018,<sup>56</sup> but it is unclear where the website is hosted or who registered it, because it is protected by Cloudflare Inc., a US company that proxies its traffic and makes it impossible to determine the real location of the webhosting company. No contact details can be found on the AFRIC’s website.

The first article on the AFRIC’s website, which is run in English and French, was published in May 2018, while the AFRIC’s Facebook page became active just three days before the Zimbabwean elections. The earliest reference to the AFRIC that could be found on the LinkedIn website, a business and employment-oriented service, appears in the profile of presumably Russian-born Catherine Terekhova who claims to have been working at the AFRIC as an Economic Analyst since January 2018.<sup>57</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>58</sup> “About AFRIC”.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

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

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

<sup>65</sup> “AFRIC Election Observer Team Jets in”.





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

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

### ***The AFRIC election observation mission and the Russian connection***

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

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

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

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

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



**Volker Tschapke, Arildiipurev Tsevelragchaa.**

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

The founder of the far-right Germany-based “Prussian Society” **Volker Tschapke**, who is known for his anti-American and pro-Russian statements,<sup>68</sup> observed the Russian 2018 presidential election as a member of the political biased international monitoring mission. **Arildiipurev Tsevelragchaa**, Director of Foreign Cooperation at Mongolian Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, took part in the same mission, as did Swedish far-right activists **Sanna Hill** and **Vávra Suk**, who run the English-language anti-American, pro-Kremlin and pro-Assad website *Free West Media*.

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

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

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

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

Two Indian observers, namely **Purnima Anand** and **Rishabh Sethi**, have direct connections to the BRICS, the association of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.<sup>70</sup> **Anand** is President of the BRICS International Forum (as well as President of the International Federation of Indo Russian Youth Clubs), while **Sethi** is Director of International Projects at the same Forum. In March 2018, **Anand** observed the Russian presidential election as a member of the political biased international monitoring mission. Interestingly, right after observing the Zimbabwean elections, South African observer **Sphiwe Dlamini** was awarded a scholarship to attend the BRICS International school that was organised by the National Russian Committee on BRICS Research and the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, and held in Moscow at the end of August 2018.<sup>71</sup>

### **Conclusion**

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

Since the established Western election observation missions declined to send observers to monitor the elections in Cambodia, while the state authorities still needed friendly Western voices who would positively assess the conduct of the parliamentary elections, Cambodia's National Election Committee accredited several minor Western missions that were coordinated and seemingly guided by the Cambodian, pro-government Civil Society Alliance Forum. These missions included the Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe, Fund for Reconciliation and Development, Centrist Democrat International and Volunteers Observers for the Cambodian Election, as well as around 30 observers collectively called the "senior delegation of the international observers", the majority of the members of which came from Western nations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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