



Overview of election observation mission statements on the July 21 early parliamentary elections

Three international organizations deployed long-term missions to the July 21 early parliamentary elections. Further six international observer delegations deployed to Ukraine for observation of election day. In total, international observers presented five statements of preliminary findings and conclusions to the public. The English and Ukrainian (if available) versions of the statements can be accessed [here](#). Most statements contain detailed information about the number of observers, their deployment, the number of polling stations and results tabulation processes observed on election day and the methodology applied as required by the UN [Declaration of Principles](#) for International Election Observation. All international EOMs but one pledged to assess the elections for their compliance with international standards, best practices for democratic elections as well as domestic legislation.

The international observation environment was hampered by the Parliament's late withdrawal of the invitation to Council of Europe observers and the continued legal ban on observers, who are citizens of the Russian Federation, even if part of multilateral observation efforts of international organizations.

All international election observation missions (EOMs) and delegations found that the 21 July early parliamentary elections were held in line with international standards for democratic elections and in respect of fundamental freedoms. They commended the CEC for a well administered elections despite time constraints. Election day was assessed overwhelmingly positive by all observers. The campaign was assessed less positive and EOMs noted that some contestants resorted to vote buying, misuse of incumbency and exploited legislative loopholes in the legal framework to their advantage. Media and campaign finance oversight was ineffective and intertwined business and political interests dictated media coverage and allowed for misuse of political finance.

Pre-election period

The **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)** Election Observation Mission (EOM) and its three parliamentary partners from the European Parliament, and the OSCE and NATO parliamentary assemblies stressed the competitive nature of the election and the competent and effective electoral administration. While noting that fundamental rights and freedoms were respected throughout, it emphasized that the campaign was marked by wide-spread vote-buying, misuse of position by incumbent MPs and officials and by candidates' exploiting loop-holes in the laws to their advantage during the campaign. This gave contestants unequal opportunities. Media coverage reflected the intertwining of business and political interests and did not provide for a level playing field. Oversight with the media campaign including on social media was inefficient and insufficient and allowed participants to misuse political finance. Unattributed campaign material and violations of campaign silence provisions were frequent.

The ODIHR EOM provided a comprehensive assessment of the legal framework and found that despite its overly detailed and convoluted nature, it was generally adequate for the conduct of democratic elections, if implemented in good faith. Undue restrictions remain such as the residency requirement for candidacy and the ban on parties and candidates with communist and national-socialist ideologies.

The ODIHR called upon the authorities to address these and other key recommendations pertaining to voting rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities, enfranchisement of IDPs and internal migrants, composition of election commissions and simplifying the dispute resolution process. The latter relates to introducing templates for complaints to bring down the number of such that are left without consideration on their merits for purely formalistic reasons.

While the ODIHR EOM noted widespread trust in the State Voter Register, observers raised concern with the near 1 million Ukrainians who do not have a registered address of residence and therefore do not appear on voter lists on election day. The EOM also observed several instances of persons who on election did not find their names on voter lists and therefore could not vote. It also found that information on voter registration and the procedure for temporary change of voting address was insufficient.

The ODIHR EOM devoted a section of its statement to the participation of national minorities. The EOM reported that the requirement for a political party to form its base from two-thirds of the country's oblasts and the five percent threshold discourages the emergence of parties that promotes the interests of national minorities. According to the EOM, the number of national minority candidates on party lists was limited; it included seven candidates with a Crimean-Tatar background. Interlocutors in Transcarpathia informed that the current boundary delimitation in the oblast is not favorable to national minority representation. Ukrainian authorities expressed concern over foreign influence in areas inhabited by members of the Hungarian minority, according to the statement. The ODIHR EOM also commented on the general boundary delimitation and found several disparities in the size of single-mandate constituencies in terms of voter population indicating a violation of the international principle of the equality of the vote. The latest boundary revision was conducted in 2012. The law does not regulate the frequency of such reviews.

The **National Democratic Institute (NDI)** observer delegation stressed the democratic nature of the parliamentary elections and praised all electoral stakeholders for delivering an election that complied with international standards and national legislation despite it took place in the context of Russian aggression and a punishing timeline. NDI emphasized that pressing challenges remain, but that these are not different from those faced by more established democracies: concentrated ownership of media in the hands of a few wealthy owners and weak regulation; lack of effective capture of third-party campaign contribution and in-kind donations to contestants; gender equity and inclusion of marginalized groups; and full enfranchisement of certain voters, including the internally displaced from the country's East and Crimea.

The NDI delegation noted domestic concerns about the recent purchase of the ZIK television channel of the leader of the Opposition Platform – For Life party and the alignment of its editorial line to mirror Russian election-related disinformation narratives in Ukraine. Such narratives portray the Ukrainian government and military as the aggressor in the war in Donbas and the Ukrainian elections as a “circus” and may have been effective in confusing the Ukrainian public. Some 5 percent of the population still gets their news primarily from Russian media, especially in the East.

NDI emphasized that parties marginally increased the number of women on their party lists and among single-mandate candidates compared to the last parliamentary elections. Still, only 13 of the 22 parties competing in the nationwide constituency had at least 30 percent women on their party list, who, in many cases, were not placed in winnable positions. Male candidates received significantly more media coverage on national television channels than women, and women candidates were often

subject to sexism and harassment in traditional and online media during the campaign. Other observer reports came to similar conclusions and called for temporary special measures for women such as a gender quota. Women were generally well represented in the election administration at all levels including in executive positions.

The **European Network of Election Monitoring Organization (ENEMO)** EOM noted that the election administration faced considerable challenges due to short deadlines and a strenuous calendar for holding the early election. The ENEMO statement highlighted the professionalism of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and commended it for generally operating in a transparent manner. The CEC practice of holding preparatory meetings open to observers only upon their request received a more negative assessment in the NDI and the ODIHR EOM statements.

ENEMO calculated that 59 percent of the total membership of district election commissions (DEC) were replaced. An additional 33 members resigned, leaving some DEC operating with down to 14 members, four less than envisaged by law. ENEMO estimated that up to 700 DEC members did not benefit from the CEC-IFES training on procedures due to the practice of political parties replacing their DEC commissioners. While all observer reports assessed the trainings for DEC and precinct election commissions (PECs) and the procedural manuals and other tutorial material in overwhelmingly positive terms, ODIHR EOM long-term observers noted low attendance at some trainings.

ENEMO noted problems for some DEC in identifying members to serve in PECs, when eligible parties and candidates had failed to suggest enough members. They observed instances where the suggested persons were not aware of their nomination or had already been suggested for PEC membership by another contestant. ODIHR added that some parties fielded members to election commissions that belonged to other parties in an effort to increase the presence of those parties on the commission in circumvention of legal limits. It condemned this practice as undermining the principle of equal representation. ODIHR assessed that replacements of election commissioners affected some 300 members in executive positions.

ENEMO analyzed the 163 domestic NGOs that received authorization to field official observers and found that many were created recently and that some 105 of them did not have a website. Only 87 of 163 NGOs requested accreditation for observers prior to the deadline. A total of 27,901 domestic observers were accredited, of which 5,500 by Civil Network OPORA and 1,738 by Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU).

The **Mission Canada** preliminary statement praised the parliamentary elections as another step towards consolidating democratic development in Ukraine and noted societal optimism for change to the better despite the continued aggression in the East and the illegal annexation of Crimea. In the section of the statement devoted to election security, Mission Canada commended the national police for being adequately prepared for their tasks – in providing security to polling stations and maintaining order during the campaign and during safe-keeping and transportation of sensitive election material on election day. The police training provided by Civic Network OPORA was assessed positively by Mission Canada and welcomed as a measure fostering cooperation and understanding between law enforcement and domestic NGO observers on their respective electoral roles.

International Republican Institute (IRI) deployed a 35-member short-term observer delegation. The statement of the IRI International Observation Mission welcomed the CEC's simplification of procedures for voters who needed to temporarily change their place of voting but noted with regret

that such individuals could not cast single-mandate constituency ballots which effectively denied these citizens of half their vote. On election day IRI found the atmosphere calm and orderly but noted tensions outside some polling stations between groups of supporters of different single-mandate constituency candidates.

The **Ukrainian World Congress (UWC)** had a limited presence in country during the election period and mainly monitored domestic and international media for instances of misinformation and foreign influence. The UWC will release its media monitoring finding after the elections. Through its diaspora members the UWC followed election day procedures at polling stations created at diplomatic missions of Ukraine abroad. The UWC cooperated with its founding member, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America for election day observation.

Campaign silence and Election Day

Several observers reported about the appearance of unmarked campaign posters and billboards during the campaign silence period and the continued presence of political advertisements on parties' official Facebook pages and in other social media on election day, in violation of legal provisions. Often the late appearing visual campaign material lacked the name of the party or contestant or political messages, but it was nevertheless easy for the public to decode it as part of the campaign, since it repeated slogans, layout features or colors used in the previous weeks by the respective campaign.

Election day was assessed overwhelmingly positive by all international EOMs. The ODIHR EOM and its parliamentary partners assessed voting as good or very good in 99 percent of the 2,634 polling stations observed during voting, indicating that procedures were overall followed. Irregularities included failure to fold the ballot paper and inconsistent check of ID during voting with some voters being allowed to vote without presenting proper ID. Counting was assessed in positive terms in 242 of the 273 polling stations observed during the vote count. Some PECs did not announce all figures as they were established during the vote count or did not follow the sequence of steps envisaged for the completion of the results protocol. The tabulation of results protocol data at the DEC was in some places not well organized or marred by tension. At times, international observers assessed the premises as not adequate and lessening the transparency of the DEC processes. All EOMs and several observer delegations noted that a significant number of polling premises were not accessible for independent access of voters with disabilities. Nearly 700.000 voters could vote at their place of stay. They raised as a concern, that persons with disabilities are often automatically put on the permanent register for homebound voting, which is not in line with Ukraine's international obligations in this field: it does not respect such individuals' right to take part in elections in polling stations on equal terms with other citizens if they should so wish.

The two main domestic observer groups – [OPORA](#) and [CVU](#) – reported isolated cases of irregularities throughout election day, but both concluded that they were not systematic and did not appear to have an impact on the outcome of the vote. Pre-signed but otherwise empty vote counting protocols was spotted in a few instances. Notable, photo-taking of marked ballot papers was recorded in significantly less instances numbers than during the presidential election. The scale of detected violations, according to OPORA, was low and on the level or lower than what was reported in the 2014 early parliamentary elections. OPORA's [parallel vote tabulation](#) of the party list election component confirmed the official preliminary results.

Recommendations and final reports on the parliamentary and presidential elections

The first international observer delegation recommendations call upon lawmakers to reform the legal framework for all elections including parliamentary election and pass existing laws that provide for full franchise to IDPs and internal migrants at current location, enhance electoral justice and remove current barriers for the election participation of persons with disabilities. The CEC needs to standardize the complaints process and publish all decisions on complaints in a public register in a timely manner, ensure better transparency and access to its sessions and deliberations.

All major election observation missions – the ODIHR EOM, ENEMO and Mission Canada – will release their recommendations for bringing the legal framework and the conduct of parliamentary elections closer in line with international standards, best practices and national legislation in their final reports. Final reports will be released some six to eight weeks after the promulgation of the final results and will be accessible on the respective websites of ODIHR, ENEMO and CANADEM. The said EOMs all still have to present their final reports on the March 31 and April 21 presidential election including recommendations pertaining to the election. The UWC is so far the only mission that has released its [final report](#) on the presidential election. IFES Ukraine will inform about the release of the respective election observer missions' final reports in its biweekly election bulletin.

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Since 1994, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has played a key role in the emergence of democratic electoral processes and institutions in Ukraine. Through this period, IFES has developed a reputation as a reliable source for impartial analysis and high-quality technical assistance in the fields of electoral and political finance law reform, election administration, civil society capacity building, civic education, and public opinion research.