

To: The Swedish Election Authority

The Swedish European elections May 25, 2014

Recommendations and observations

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1. THE MISSION

1.1 About the mission

Six observers from the Swedish International Liberal Centre visited a total of 18 polling stations in Stockholm (Gärdet, Old Town and Rinkeby) on Election Day (from 07:30 til around 23:00). The stations were visited in groups of two, and each station was observed for 15 to 60 minutes. The observers came from Sweden, Lithuania and Belarus, and had previous experience of election observation in Lithuania, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Azerbaijan. Participants were provided with badges with their name and “election observer”. This report contains the group’s recommendations and observations.

The short-term objective with individual election observation missions is to alert authorities and the public about fraud and shortcomings in the electoral system, and to suggest measures to deal with those shortcomings. The long-term aim of electoral observation is to improve the electoral systems and thus citizens' confidence in democracy.

1.2 Monitoring

Points of systematic monitoring were :

- **Are the election officers properly checking voter IDs before the votes are cast?**

Finding: The observers could conclude that all the election officers checked ID, and saw several instances where voters were refused to vote because they did not bring valid ID (also see Section 2.4, third paragraph of this report).

- **Is there any political campaigning material in or near the polling station?**

Finding: The observers saw no political campaigning materials in or directly adjacent to the premises (except for ballot adjudicators wearing party symbols outside the premises). In one polling station, observers witnessed a political conversation between a voter and an election officer, regarding the prognosis for a particular party and their views on it, a conversation that, in the opinion of the observers was inappropriate.

- **Does “family voting” occur?**

Finding: Family voting was common, we saw examples of this in every other polling station. Usually it didn’t seem to be couples but friends of the same age.

- **Do the observers have full access to the venues and the opportunity to observe how the elections are held?**

Results: Observers were very well received by election officers in all polling stations and full transparency of the process, not only the voting, but also before the polling station opened and during the counting of the votes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

2.1 Recommendations

- The place where voters take ballot papers should be more private, so as not to require an action from the voter in order to protect his or her secret ballot.

This can be satisfied by putting up a screen around the table where the ballot papers are placed or by placing the table in a more remote location. We are aware that this would complicate the work of the election officers, since they must ensure that no one hides or removes the ballot papers, but we feel this is important for maintaining the secrecy of the ballot. Some people might like to get a chance to stop and read the lists of candidates, especially since many parties no longer send the ballot to peoples' homes. This need can be met by ballot (possibly enlarged) posted on the wall a suitable distance from the polling station, as it is done in many other countries.

- Measures should be taken against "family voting " .

Intervening when two people are already voting together can lead to a small conflict in the polling station, therefore the voters should be clearly informed about this rule beforehand. This can be done verbally (when they step into the room) or in writing (a sign on the green screen).

- The conditions for observation should be made clear to potential foreign and domestic observers .

This can be done either through new provisions in the electoral law or by clear information from the electoral authority. See OSCE delegation's recommendation for the elections of 2010. *"However, the lack of legal basis for the access of observers does not ensure the effective implementation of paragraph 8 of the OSCE Copenhagen Document and does not guarantee full access to all stages of the process. The legislation would benefit from the inclusion of explicit legal provisions to guarantee full access of domestic and international observers and to set out their rights and responsibilities."*¹

- Polling stations should be planned so that there is an appropriate place for observers to stand or sit.

Everyone has the right to monitor what is happening in the polling stations, this should naturally be reflected in the design of the polling station. In some polling stations, there was no suitable place for observers to stand or sit, which resulted in unnecessary disruption of the process. Voters thought that we were queuing up to vote, or that we were election officers. Chairs for election observers should be positioned so that they can see the commission, for example at the opposite wall of the commission.

¹ SWEDEN GENERAL ELECTIONS 19 September 2010, OSCE/ODHIR Needs Assessment Mission 9-11 June 2010, Warsaw 28 July 2010. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/70947?download=true>

2.2 Maintaining the secrecy of the ballot

The system of an individual ballot paper for each party, which the voter picks from a stand near the polling station, can be problematic in relation to the secrecy of the ballot. According to tradition, one can defend one's right to a secret ballot by picking one ballot from each party, and put the ballot of one's choice in the envelope while standing behind the screen. We noted, however, that only few did so. Most took only one or two ballots, and it was very easy for others voters and election officers to see which party it was. In a situation where people come to the polling station with friends or family (or are acquainted with the election officers) and where the collective opinion is that "you should not have anything to hide", this can lead to limiting people's choices. Particularly when many may not even know that it is "customary" to take ballots from all parties. This, coupled with the widespread occurrence of family voting, means that there is reason to worry about the maintenance of the secret ballot in Swedish elections. The process at polling stations should be planned in a way that voters should not have to "sneak " with papers or ask others to leave or step aside .

2.3 Opportunities for observation of Swedish elections

There is no tradition in Sweden of independent election monitoring; there are no special rules on accreditation or the powers of election observers. The possibility to monitor elections is based on the Swedish administration's general principle on transparency. Election officers in the polling station we visited had never before been visited by observers. Despite that no election officer showed any sign of worry or suspicion, all had a welcoming and open attitude. We got immediate answers to our questions about the number of people in the electoral roll, the number of received advance votes and votes by messenger, and they spoke readily about any problems that had arisen during the day. We were allowed to closely observe the count and the writing of the protocol (we were even allowed to take a photo of the protocol). There was an atmosphere of trust between voters and election officers, and election officers were often noticeably proud of their mission. The Swedish political culture is significantly different from countries where confidence is low and the procedures and roles are covered in detail in order to formally ensure transparency and legal certainty, while understanding and respect for the fundamental principles of law in practice is non-existent. On the contrary, actually, we saw it as a problem that election officers sometimes gave us a little too much attention and service, which led to situations where our visits disrupted the ordinance more than necessary. Although observers are unusual, it would be good if the election officers were informed about possible observers' role. It would also be good if election observers were informed clearly about what you may do in the premises (are observers allowed to take pictures?) and what you can ask of election officers (does one have the right to copy the protocol and request that the election officers witness it?) .

2.4 Other observations

On several occasions, we saw that only two election officers were in the room, although the law states that there should never be fewer than three.

During the counting, observers noted the problem of voters putting two ballots in the same envelope. In one of the polling stations an envelope with two ballots was discovered during the opening of the envelopes (the envelope was put aside and decision was to be made by the higher commission). When the votes were counted however, there was still one ballot too much. The most likely explanation is that there was another envelope with two ballots, which was not detected when emptying the envelopes. In another polling station there were ten cases of voters putting too many ballots in the envelope (discovered during the emptying of the envelopes).

In one polling station it was discovered that a father had accidentally pre-voted with his son's voting card. This was discovered when the son came to vote, and was informed that an early vote had been submitted in his name. The mistake could be corrected (the son took the vote back, and the father came and voted at the polling station for himself). However, this shows that ID check during pre-voting lacked.

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