



Preliminary report on the Kremlin-friendly international electoral observation

Several established organisations monitored the Russian presidential election on the 18th of March 2018. These included (1) the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States, (2) Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, (3) Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Belarus and Russia, (4) Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), (5) OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, (6) Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, and (7) Interparliamentary Assembly On Orthodoxy.

However, there were around 300 electoral observers who monitored the election upon individual invitations from the State Duma and Federation Council. Inviting these particular observers follows a long tradition of using alternative mechanisms and practices for international election observer missions that aim to give legitimacy to the electoral processes that lack, to various degrees, essential characteristics of being free and fair. Preliminary research suggests that these observers can be referred to as Kremlin-friendly, as their impressions about the electoral process were positive already before the electoral process took place and fully complied with the official position of the Kremlin, e.g. in terms of vindicating the illegal annexation of Crimea.

While the invitations to these Kremlin-friendly observers were signed by the Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin and Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Ilyas Umakhanov, the main official behind inviting them was Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs 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. Apparently, former PACE president Pedro Agramunt and Spanish MP Jordi Xuclà (Slutsky took both of them on a Russian military plane to meet Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad in 2017) and French MP Thierry Mariani (who enjoyed several fully-funded trips to Russia-annexed Crimea) were invited by Slutsky personally.

Slutsky's second role was that of an intermediary between, on the one hand, Volodin and Umakhanov, and, on the other, several Russian and foreign organisations that invited individual international observers. These organisations include, but are not limited to, (1) "Public Diplomacy" (Russia) headed by Aleksey Kochetkov and Stanislav Byshok (both have also been involved in the workings of the CIS-EMO); (2) the "Civic Control" Association (Russia) headed by Aleksandr Brod; (3) the European Council on Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR) (Poland) headed Janusz Niedźwiecki, (4) the Agency of Ethno-national Strategies (Russia) Aleksandr Kobrinsky.

These and, highly likely, other facilitating agencies contacted potential international observers, sent them application forms and then forwarded the forms to Slutsky 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.

Preliminary research suggests all travel and accommodation expenses of individual observers invited by the ECDHR would be covered by the Russian Peace Foundation, an organisation headed by Slutsky and formally not related directly to the Russian state.

Kremlin-friendly international observers monitored the presidential election in two areas, namely the Russian Federation and Russia-annexed Crimea. In each case, international observers could be divided into two three large groups: (1) acting or former politicians, (2) political scientists and experts, and (3) lay people (businessmen, musicians, TV hosts, students, etc.). Some of the identified observers from the first category include members of the political parties such as, for example, Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgaria), Republicans (France), French Action (France), National Front (France), Socialist Party (France), Social Democratic Party (Portugal), Northern League (Italy), Latvian Russian Union (Latvia), Social Democratic Party "Harmony" (Latvia), Alternative for Germany (Germany), the Left (Germany) or Progressive Party of Working People (Cyprus).

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