



ГРАЖДАНСКАЯ ИНИЦИАТИВА

Минск 220 131 аля 434

www.partnerstva.org

e-mail: partnerstva@partnerstva.org

Тел. + 375 17 282 19 00

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 18, 2004

Contact Information:

www.belarusvote.org

press@partnerstva.org

+375-29-683 82 50

Belarus Non-Partisan Election Observation Determines Official Government Election Results Do Not Reflect Will of People

Government Violated Election Laws, Illegally Used Administrative Resources and Intimidated Independent Observers

Minsk, Belarus – The civic initiative *Partnership* announced findings from its non-partisan observation of the Belarus parliamentary and referendum elections covering the period from October 12 to 17, 2004. Election observers in Belarus observed systematic violations of major election laws by the government, the illegal use of administrative resources and the outright intimidation of independent observers during both the early voting period as well on the day of the election.

“We are not able to independently confirm the official election results stated by the Belarusian Central Election Commission,” said Nikolai Astrejka, Executive Director of *Partnership*. “The entire electoral process was manipulated by the government from beginning to end, and as a result the will of the people is not reflected in the official elections results.”

During the early voting period (October 12-16), the legitimacy of the electoral process was called into question when 600 violations were submitted to authorities. In addition, the cancellation of 11 candidates during the early voting period clearly influenced the final election results and did not conform to internationally accepted international electoral standards. On the final day of voting (October 17), 40 observers were excluded from polling stations and approximately 3,000 were unable to observe the actual counting of the ballots.

“The independent observation of the counting of ballots is integral to the protection of the electoral process against fraud and *Partnership*’s independent observers were not allowed to observe the counting at a majority of polling stations,” said Astrejka. “The citizens of Belarus placed their trust in government authorities to protect the electoral process and the government failed. The official election results have been seriously undermined.”

The referendum campaign was marred by the illegal and widespread use of administrative resources by the government and the inconsistent application of election laws. All government agencies acted in support of the referendum and the pro-referendum campaign was even broadcast on State Television during the entire election period. However, campaign activities against the referendum resulted in arrests, fines and candidate disqualifications. This double standard was also noted during the pre-election period for parliamentary candidates with the media reporting on incumbent members of parliament favorably while broadcasting and printing stories on opposition political candidates that were highly slanted.

“Placing a referendum on the ballot to change the constitution was highly inappropriate given that our monitors determined early in the process that the Belarusian government had established an unfair playing field for the parliamentary elections already,” said Astrejka. “Based upon our analysis of turnout rates, the official results of the referendum (77% yes) were highly improbable given that Western independent pollsters determined that a minority of all registered voters (48% yes) favored the referendum.”

“Although we encountered illegal pressure from the authorities – including random arrests, confiscations of property and physical intimidation – we successfully observed the electoral process in approximately 25% of all polling stations in all 110 jurisdictions,” said Astrejka.

In early November, a full report on the results of the non-partisan observation of the parliamentary elections and referendum will be released to the media and public.

For more information about *Partnership*, the non-partisan observation and their recommendations to improve the election process, please go to <http://www.belarusvote.org>.

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