



“Golos” movement for the defence of voters’ rights golosinfo.org

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PRELIMINARY STATEMENT on the early vote on the amendment of the Russian Constitution

On several occasions, the “Golos” movement has highlighted that the rules of the of the All-Russian vote process itself do not allow the expression of the people’s free will: the amendments are presented as a single “package”; in campaigning, the equality of rights between the supporters and the opponents of the amendments is not provided; the governmental and municipal bodies as well as the electoral commissions engage in campaigning in support of the amendments.

The way in which the election is run is contrary to both the Russian Constitution and the international voting

standards. Nevertheless, we have taken the decision to conduct observation on the voting days in order to document the events as much as they could be. Pointing out problems, and objectively and fully informing society about them – those are some of our main goals.

The present statement is preliminary and covers solely the early voting on 25th to 30th June. The preliminary statement on the observation on 1st July - the main day of the vote – will be published on 2nd July.

During the period spanning 25th to 30th June, “Golos” conducted a short term observation in 42 regions. It is

based on data received from the regions and collected from voters and organisers of the vote, as well as observers and representatives of the media, from different channels, including the hotline 8 800 333-33-50, “the Map of Violations”, media, the internet, social networks and messaging services.

During the period from 25th June until 13 hours on 30th June, the “Golos” movement received 1587 reports; of those 513 were on the hotline, 1074 on “the Map of Violations” and other electronic communication channels. A total of 682 reports show signs of irregularities.



The main conclusions from the course of the days of early voting

1. Abuse of power and illegal activities by the electoral commissions

- The Russian Central Electoral Commission has repeatedly gone beyond the legally established boundaries of its powers. In the course of the five days, various forms of mass early voting were employed, despite not being stipulated in the law about the amendment. Despite the fact, that the order of voting was handed by the constitutional law-making authority to the Central Electoral Commission, it hasn't delegated to it, as organiser of the vote, the powers to establish neither the times, nor the forms of voting; to the contrary, the law-making authority has independently established the strict timeframes of the vote – in accordance to the stipulations of article 5, part 2 of the law on the amendment of the Constitution of the Russian Federation dated 14th March 2020, Number 1-FKZ “On perfecting the regulation of independent questions relating to the organisation and functioning of the public authority” stating that “The All-Russian vote cannot take place earlier than 30 days from the day of the official publication of the order of the President of the Russian Federation relating to its designation”. The order was published on 1st June, therefore, even arithmetically, the All-Russian vote cannot commence prior to 1st July. Thus the Russian CEC abused its powers by arbitrarily expanding the timeframe of the vote and establishing its forms not in accordance with the law.
- The Russian CEC has illegally created a Special Territorial Electoral Commission (TEC) for the remote electronic voting. The powers to establish the TECs (with the exclusions of the ones located abroad) belong to the regional commissions; therefore, the Russian CEC has again gone beyond the boundaries of its powers and made all the online voting de facto illegal.
- Lacking the legal grounds to do so, it arbitrarily extended the powers of the 164 district commissions.
- In such an atmosphere, the members of the subordinate commissions do not feel limited by the limitations of the legal boundaries. Thus their readiness to hand out ballots without the necessary voters' identity verification or to allow substitute voting, or else to break the legal electoral conventions, come as no surprise. The commission members arbitrarily substitute the “near domestic” votes with the “domestic” ones, they attend companies to organise voting there, without receiving a permit for that from the responsible commission or the necessary declarations from the citizens themselves. The “Golos” movement is concerned that, such arbitrary actions, will later be used during elections.

2. Compulsory vote

- One of the key problems preventing any serious discussion on the possibilities to establish the people's free will consists of the compelling of citizens to participate in the vote. Such compulsion is generated by employers, representatives of state institutions and of local authorities. The citizens actively report these facts to the “Golos” movement, to the media or simply write about them in the social networks.
- Additionally, the companies and establishments



themselves, located in numerous regions and composed of different branches, have publicly reported on the massive voting of their employees; that is only possible in the event if the leadership of those organisations is not only organising but also controlling the participation of their employees in the vote. Such

public accounting about the compelling of people to vote by the leaders of the organisations is evidence of the removal of all the impressions of normalcy in the electoral process and of the lack of understanding on how democratic and free expression of the will should be fulfilled.

3. Illegal campaigning by the electoral commissions, government and municipal bodies, as well as by their office holders

- Illegal campaigning was noted on the days of voting as well: in the buildings where the commissions are based, materials with obvious campaigning orientation were found; civil servants continue to engage in campaigning for the passing of the amendments. For example, special edition of the “Komsomolskaya Pravda” newspaper “Amendments of the Constitutions – that is my choice!” were found in the polling stations of numerous regions of the country; they contain direct appeals to vote for the amendments and include supportive statements by famous

people. The members of the polling commissions state that they received the newspapers in the territorial commission together with other documents and informational materials to be displayed at the polling stations. All this allows us to speak about the centralised distribution of such materials through the system of the electoral commissions. We would like to remind that the law on the amendment stipulates that the electoral commissions, the government and municipal bodies should only engage in informing.

4. Multiple voting, ballot-box stuffing, violation of the secret vote and other falsifications

- In the last days, there has been an increase in the quantity of reports relating to incidents of multiple voting, voting without a passport, proxy voting and of likely ballot-box stuffing: photographs of packs of ballots, placed in orderly fashion inside the ballot boxes were received, including from the Tambov Oblast (District) – one of the leading Russian regions in voter turnout. Furthermore, there has been a

spread of multiple voting violations, including by use of online vote.

- It has been shown that upon organising voting at homes, the secrecy of the vote was not always provided: citizens had to fill ballots in shops, on tree stumps, on the hoods of vehicles – under the eyes of other voters and commission members.



5. Bad normative regulation of the voting processes and infringement of the principle of collegiality

- Unfortunately, the majority of violations are caused by the rules of the vote as agreed by the Central Electoral Commission that introduced new forms of voting, facilitating the breaching of its secrecy and the compulsion, and that also expanded the use of the early and of voting at home. Thus, the statutory documents did not contain the necessary guarantees to defend the rights of the voters’.
- The normative-legal regulation creates the opportunities for the abuse of multiple voting – the Russian CEC has practically admitted the possibility of multiple voting for participants abroad; the regulation of the electronic vote does not contain the necessary means to defend from the repeat voting with the regular ballot; the organising of the mass voting within the confines of companies creates comfortable conditions for the leadership to compel citizens to participate in the vote.
- The normative-legal regulations are very confused in many different ways; thus, that voting within the confines of companies, can in accordance to the law -agreed by the Russian CEC- be classified both as voting not within the polling stations and as voting prior to the polling day, although these two forms of voting are based on different things and require the compliance with different procedures. The members of the PECs are insufficiently trained, confuse “near domestic” voting and voting “in venues other than polling stations”, illegally visit the flats and homes of citizens without the receipt of the necessary permits.
- The mass early voting has brought the actual infringement of the principle of the collegiality in the activities of the electoral commissions. Early and “home” voting is conducted by two or three commission members, who are designated by the chairman of the PEC. On elections, when as a rule, such forms of voting only involve a small number of citizens, this has no critical impact. This time however, the early voting is massive; this not only lowers the level of control over such voting and the citizens’ votes’ protection from fraud, but also transforms the requirement of the quorum’s presence within the electoral commission on 1st July into a pure formality – if the tendency in regards to the numbers if voters stays as it is, 1st July will only see voting by a small proportion of the country’s inhabitants.



6. Opposition to civil observation and attempts at its discrediting with the government’s participation

- The vote is taking place in conditions of opposition to civil control. Even members of the commissions encounter in their work; often, they are not allowed to see the commission’s documents, issue copies of certificates or to attend voting at home. Attempts are made to limit the observers’ rights to photograph and film and to have access to the commissions’ documents; attempts at removal from the polling stations are also made. Much concern arises from reports that, in Moscow, such actions are undertaken systematically, in accordance with the directives of the chairmen of the territorial commissions.
- Concern also arises because of the continuing pressure, made on the organisers of the observation; that is done with the use of the law enforcement agencies in the regions; also a step by step and centralised campaign to discredit civil observation. Several waves of attempts at discrediting the “Golos” movement have already taken place. They used misinformation by anonymous telegram channels and small circulation media; the “Golos” movement has been accused of receiving instructions as well as five million Dollars from foreign states, of distributing provocative manuals and training observers to create falsifications, the existence of upfront prepared reports on the course of the vote. Members of the Council for Human Rights of the Russian President and members of the Civic Chamber are taken an active part in the spread of this fake information. Subsequently, the First and NTV television channels broadcasted reports based on this fabricated data, to which the “Golos” movement has no relationship whatsoever.
- Attempts to inhibit the real civil control is taking place on a background of profanation of observation

by the civic chambers. Despite the declared hundreds of thousands of observers, in reality, the polling stations stand practically empty. Sometimes, they are attended by one or two members of the PEC and by police officers. Moreover, certain civic chambers delay

in issuing directions to citizens who expressed the wish to participate as observers, or else they send them to polling stations located far from their places of residence.

7. Lack of appropriate conditions for the organisation of the vote

- The organising of “the vote at home” puts the health and safety of the electoral commissions members under threat. For example, attacks on commission members occurred in Kurgan; in Barnaul, a member of the PEC suffered a heat stroke and sunburns. Thus, such risks cannot be justified in most cases, especially in cities – there, the area of the districts is not large, from the voting at home location to that of the PEC is a distance that can be a mere 100 to 150 meters; also the number of voters is negligible.
- The conduct of the vote in the conditions of the

ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has already led to the contamination of commission members as well as a de facto disenfranchising by loss of voting rights because of the quarantine restrictions for several groups of participants and to an increased risk of contagion to commission members. Therefore, there was no objective necessity to conduct the All-Russian vote in such conditions – as opposed to elections, that are strictly tied to the end of terms of office of elected bodies; the postponement of the vote would not have infringed the political rights of the citizens.

8. Abnormal voter turnout

- The official data on participation raises several questions. According to the Russian CEC, almost 50 million people voted by 29th June – about 46% of registered voters. The official data of voter turnout shows a significant and unexplainable difference between the regions. Often, neighbouring and very similar regions display rates that are several times smaller or larger. For instance, one of the leaders among the regions is the Republic of Tuva, where during the first five days, an alleged 73.2% of registered voters have

cast their ballots. In the neighbouring Irkutsk Oblast (District), the participation rate is so low that it places it in the last position, totalling 22,4% - four times less. In the Altai Republic, adjacent to Tuva and very similar to it by its population structure, climate and landscape; participation reached 32.95% Such differences can only be explained by the compulsory voting in certain territories or by outright fraud.

