



## EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

### **Single Voting Day 2020 in Russia: Legal Arbitrariness, Electoral Fraud and Bans on Broadcasting**

#### **Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is dismayed at numerous cases of violations of the rights of voters, observers and members of election committees, aggression, as well as electoral fraud, bribing of voters and forced voting during the so-called Single Voting Day in Russia, which was held on 13 September 2020. We demand from the Russian authorities to investigate all cases of violations and electoral fraud, as well as to recount votes at those polling stations where serious violations were detected.

As it was often the case before, legal arbitrariness during the Single Voting Day turned out to be the apogee of the dirty election campaigns. The attempted poisoning of the opposition politician Alexei Navalny after his visit to Novosibirsk and Tomsk<sup>1</sup> is just an illustration of the conditions under which they took place. After all, exactly in the elections to the councils of both cities, the ruling “United Russia” party suffered the most significant losses among all Russian regions<sup>2</sup>.

For the first time in history, the Single Voting Day in Russia took place under the new rules throughout three calendar days (with early voting on 11 and 12 September and the main voting day on 13 September). During the early voting, such violations as non-observance of the rights of citizen observers and members of election committees, absolute prohibition or restrictions on photo and video shooting, forced voting or bribing of voters were revealed<sup>3</sup>. Thus, some observers were denied access to polling stations that were organised at restricted access activities, as well as to voter lists and early voting records. The public observation of the voting process was complicated by the possibility for the voters to express their will outside of the polling stations or outside of their homes<sup>4</sup>, a practice that had been tested during the nation-wide voting on the amendments to the Russian Constitution. One of the front-runners here was Sevastopol in Crimea, a territory illegally annexed by Russia<sup>5</sup>. Finally, the ban on the participation of citizens registered in another constituent entity of the Russian Federation made it impossible for observers from those constituent entities, where elections were not happening, to take part in the observation missions.

On the main voting day, the violations continued. The GOLOS Movement reports that the number of complaints about mass violations of the observers’ rights has reached a record number in past four years<sup>6</sup>. Many election committees rejected observers’ complaints, protracted their examination or did not consider them at all<sup>7</sup>. There was a number of reports on countermeasures against the work of

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/08/20/before-he-became-violently-ill>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/09/14/everybody-s-a-winner>

<sup>3</sup> See [www.golosinfo.org/en/articles/144710](http://www.golosinfo.org/en/articles/144710)

<sup>4</sup> See also a statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum of 13 July 2020 at <https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/StatementRussianConstitution13.07.2020.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/09/14/everybody-s-a-winner>

<sup>6</sup> See [www.golosinfo.org/en/articles/144710](http://www.golosinfo.org/en/articles/144710)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

observers, for instance, restrictions on photo and video recording at polling stations in the Cheliabinsk, Krasnodar and Riazan regions, as well as in the Republic of Tatarstan<sup>8</sup>. The situation in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District deserves a special mention, as the photo and video recording there was prohibited altogether, with the regional law as a reference.

Moreover, in several constituent entities of the Russian Federation (Cheliabinsk, Moscow, Orel and Tomsk regions; cities of Kaliningrad, Krasnodar, Moscow, Perm and Vladimir), complaints about home voter lists were recorded: many voters said they had never applied for a voting at home. There were also cases of forced voting in budget organisations and vote buying in the Novosibirsk, Orel and Riazan regions.

There were cases of pressure on observers, often with the use of force. The most blatant violation was recorded in Vladimir, where 15 observers had been locked in a police station for 18 hours without food, water or communication, then they were taken outside of the city and urged not to come back to the polling stations<sup>9</sup>.

There were reports on forced voting, administrative control over the voter turnout and bribery in 26 federal constituent entities. Besides, at several polling stations in the Orel region, the introduction of additional voting ballots led to the cancellation of a large number of those ones, which had been filled in already.

A special attention should be paid to the restrictions on online observation. The website with live video broadcasting from polling stations was excluded from Yandex and Google search engines, while the link to this also disappeared from the website of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation<sup>10</sup>.

The fact that, even though the number of violations was so big, some independent candidates were elected in several regions of Russia<sup>11</sup>, shows a desire of citizens to change the system and a need for its radical restructuring.

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum demands from the Russian authorities an unconditional observance of the electoral rights of the Russian citizens, the rights of observers and members of election committees, as well as transparency of elections. In particular, we call for the investigation of all cases of violations and electoral fraud, as well as the recounting of votes at those polling stations where serious violations were detected. We also demand to abolish a new practice of voting outside of the polling stations or outside of homes, as well as to grant observers the right to freely move around polling stations and to give them access to the voter lists and voting records.

21 September 2020

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<sup>8</sup> For the record of these and further violations, please see [www.kartanarusheniy.org/2020-09-13](http://www.kartanarusheniy.org/2020-09-13) (in Russian)

<sup>9</sup> See [www.znak.com/2020-09-13/vo\\_vladimire\\_nablyudateley\\_ot\\_spravedlivoy\\_rossii\\_derzhali\\_v\\_policii\\_18\\_chasov\\_bez\\_vody](http://www.znak.com/2020-09-13/vo_vladimire_nablyudateley_ot_spravedlivoy_rossii_derzhali_v_policii_18_chasov_bez_vody) (in Russian)

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/09/14/russia-s-weekend-regional-election-results-in-a-nutshell>

<sup>11</sup> See <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/09/14/everybody-s-a-winner>

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**The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum** was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 183 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members or supporters of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history and civic education.