



Elections in Russia 2021: An Agony of the Democratic Process **Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is dismayed at the continuous degradation of the electoral process in Russia, as well as numerous cases of violations at the elections of various levels held on 17-19 September 2021. We demand from the Russian authorities and the Central Election Commission (CEC) to investigate all cases of the protocolled violations and to come back to the practice of real democratic elections.

The attack on voters' rights started long before the elections themselves. For instance, the CEC has excessively limited online public broadcasting from the polling stations¹. A large number of opposition candidates were not allowed to participate in the elections². There has been significantly limited access to information on the websites of election commissions at various levels³. The presence of international observers has been diminished to an absolute minimum, and did not allow for sending an OSCE mission to Russia and restricted the observation possibilities of the Council of Europe delegation⁴.

The practice of "spoiler attacks", when spoiler candidates with similar names are running against opposition candidates in order to siphon votes from the "real" candidates, has become very popular. The apotheosis of this practice was a case in St. Petersburg, in which two candidates changed their first and their last names on purpose in order to participate in the elections⁵.

Practices of labelling independent voices as "foreign agents," "undesirable organisations" and "extremist organisations" have been increasingly used to discredit candidates, organisations and associations^{6 7}.

In recent years, the electoral legislation has been changed 19 times; seven changes have been introduced mere months before the voting⁸. Many restrictions have been explained in connection with the continuing coronavirus pandemic.

During the elections, the new regulations have been abused in numerous violations and falsifications, including throwing in additional ballots, in particular at night, when the observers did not have access to the polling stations; a disproportional rate of home voting; multiple voting at different polling stations, etc.⁹

¹ See <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-elections-dearth-information/31456424.html>

² See www.golosinfo.org/articles/145460 (in Russian)

³ See www.golosinfo.org/articles/145481 (in Russian)

⁴ See <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/russia/494488>

⁵ See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/06/three-near-identical-boris-vishnevskys-on-st-petersburg-election-ballot>

⁶ See e.g. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-golos-foreign-agent/31417215.html>

⁷ See e.g. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/09/10/who-has-been-banned-from-russias-parliamentary-elections-a74848>

⁸ See <https://www.golosinfo.org/articles/145286> (in Russian)

⁹ See <https://www.golosinfo.org/en/articles/145501>

The practice of distance electronic voting, used for the first time in the elections to the State Duma in some regions, is also a matter of grave concern. The CEC published the results of electronic voting in Moscow with a delay of many hours; these data are very difficult to find on the election commissions' websites¹⁰. At the same time, the results of the electronic voting are strikingly different from the results of voting at polling stations¹¹.

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum considers these facts violations of voters' rights and of freedom of speech and demands an unconditional observance of the electoral rights of the Russian citizens, as well as transparency of elections. We consistently demand from the Russian authorities and the Central Election Commission to investigate all the cases of violations and electoral fraud, as well as the recounting of votes at those polling stations where serious violations were detected.

Finally, we stand for the abolition of the infamous practice of voting over several days, the free access of independent observers, including those with an international mandate, to polling stations, and the return of Russia to real democratic procedures.

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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, 189 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.

¹⁰ See <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/09/20/flipping-moscow>

¹¹ See <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/09/20/flipping-moscow>