

Statement of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee, 15 November 2012

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## Ukraine 'missed opportunity' for free and fair elections

Ukraine's parliamentary elections on 28 October 2012 represent another missed opportunity in an Eastern Partnership country to conduct a ballot that is not only free and fair, but is also seen to be free and fair.

The delays in announcing the results and the admission by the Central Election Commission that it was unable to determine who had won parliamentary seats in five elections for 'first past the post' seats marked an evident failure by the election authorities to conduct the vote properly. The confusion was compounded when opposition parties challenged the vote in several other 'first past the post' constituencies.

In the election, the 450 seats to the Verkhovna Rada were to be filled according to two systems – half through 'first past the post' elections in districts (the majoritarian segment) and the other half were chosen from a national list where seats were allocated proportionally to the support they gained in the national ballot (the proportional segment).

The nationwide count by the election commissions in the proportional segment corresponded to the many exit polls that were conducted on voting day and gave the governing party a majority over the main opposition party. The result gave a clear picture of the balance of political forces which has not been questioned by the participants in the elections.

However, the counting in the majoritarian election was marred by a lack of transparency and irregularities in ballot documents which gave rise to well grounded charges that results were falsified in this segment of the voting. Indications that this would be the case came well before voting day when a large-scale operation was carried out to put supporters of the ruling party into district and precinct

election commissions. The result has been that, in all probability, the composition of the new Verkhovna Rada fails to reflect the real election result.

The Civil Society Forum election task force is sorry to note that many of the pathological features of elections which have been observed in other Eastern Partnership countries such as voter bribery, the use of the official administration to support ruling party candidates, and a lack of balance in the media were also present in the Ukrainian election. These pathological features show a growing cynicism about the election process not only on the part of politicians but also by the voters who, it appears, are ready to accept bribes from politicians. Increasingly, voters and politicians see elections as a source of financial gain rather than as a process designed to choose a legislature and a legitimate government which is accepted as such by society.

Great respect and gratitude should, all the more, be accorded to the many thousands of domestic and international observers who monitored the election in Ukraine, as well as sociologists who conducted opinion polls and exit polls. Their reports credibly described the various methods employed to distort the outcome of the election.

The election shows that the European Union must keep up the pressure on the Ukrainian authorities to ensure conditions for free and fair elections and that election monitoring both by local and international observers must be maintained in future elections in Ukraine. The Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum declares that it is its intention to assist in these efforts.

**Steering Committee, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**