

Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate “General Elections” in the Donetsk People’s Republic and Lugansk People’s Republic in November 2018

Report by Anton Shekhovtsov



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/alexistarrade.AT/posts/2144068252324053>

Executive summary

- As the holding of “general elections” in the internationally non-recognised Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR) ran counter to the Minsk agreements, the international community considered them as illegitimate and did not send any observers to monitor them.
- Aiming to fill the void of legitimacy, the “authorities” of the DPR and LPR claimed to have invited 48 and 45 “international observers” respectively from Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Kongo, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Syria, Turkey, USA and Yemen, as well as from “Abkhazia”, “Palestine” and “South Ossetia”.
- We have identified 39 “observers” in the case of the DPR and 43 – in the case of the LPR. Out of the identified individuals, around half of them were politicians and state officials. Other

“observers” were predominantly businessmen, students, journalists, and far-right and far-left activists and conspiracy theorists. None of the observers were transparent about the methodology they employed for observing the election processes and, therefore, did not comply with the “Code of Conduct for International Election Observers” endorsed by all relevant international election observation organisations, including ODIHR/OSCE.

- The overwhelming majority of non-Russian “international observers” have already been involved in various pro-Kremlin efforts that include, but are not limited to: (1) previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and elsewhere; (2) legitimisation and justification of Russia’s actions directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; (3) criticism of the sanctions imposed on Russia in relation to its aggression towards Ukraine; (4) cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik); (5) membership in pro-Kremlin movements, groups and organisations.
- “International observers” were highly visible in the media space of the DPR and LPR: more than one-third of all news stories published on the voting day mentioned “international observers”.
- “International observers” were invited to the DPR and LPR in order to provide a sense of general legitimacy and normalcy to the “elections” in the eyes of the domestic and Russian audiences.
- Aiming to provide legitimacy to the otherwise illegitimate “elections”, the media of the DPR, LPR and Russia disinformed their audiences about the real international perception of the “general elections”, as well as promoting the following five major narratives: (1) the “elections” did not run counter to the Minsk agreements, and, therefore, were legitimate; (2) the “elections” were characterised by a high turnout and active participation; (3) the “elections” took place in a calm and orderly manner; (4) the life in the DPR and LPR is safe and peaceful; and (5) the international community should recognise the “elections”, as well as independence and sovereignty of the DPR and LPR.

Introduction

On the 11 November 2018, two internationally unrecognised “states”, Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR), held “elections” to elect heads of their “republics” and members of their “parliaments”. Both “states” are geographically located within the internationally recognised borders of Ukraine (in particular areas of Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts), but in April 2014 pro-Russian separatists, who received military, financial and political backing from the Russian Federation, declared independence from Ukraine.

No internationally recognised state recognises the DPR and LPR as sovereign states, but they are recognised as such by each other, as well as Abkhazia, a partially recognised breakaway “republic” located within the internationally recognised borders of Georgia. Russia does not recognise either the DPR or LPR, but it still provides political, military, financial and other support for the functioning of the

two “states”. Ukraine refers to their territories as “temporarily occupied and uncontrolled territories of Ukraine” and identifies the DPR and LPR as “terrorist organisations”.¹

In September 2014, representatives of Ukraine, Russia, DPR, LPR and OSCE signed the so-called Minsk Protocol aimed at ending the war between Ukrainian and (pro-)Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine. In particular, the Minsk Protocol stated the need to “ensure early local elections in accordance with the Ukrainian law ‘On temporary Order of Local Self-Governance in Particular Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts’”.²

However, the DPR and LPR held their first “general elections” on 2 November 2014 outside the framework set by the Ukrainian law. In the run-up to the “elections”, neither Ukraine, nor the EU or established international organisations such as the United Nations or OSCE said that they would recognise them. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deplored “the planned holding by armed rebel groups in eastern Ukraine of their own ‘elections’ on 2 November, in breach of the Constitution and national law”, saying that those “elections” would “seriously undermine the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum”.³ The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Didier Burkhalter stated that the “elections” in the DPR and LPR would run “counter to the letter and spirit of the Minsk Protocol and would further complicate its implementation”.⁴ Despite this, Russia recognised the “elections” in November 2014.

On 7 September 2018, the authorities of the DPR and LPR declared that they would hold “elections” on 11 November 2018.⁵ As in the case of the “elections” in 2014, the “elections” would be held according to the “laws” of the DPR and LPR, rather than the Ukrainian law, as stipulated in the Minsk Protocol. As a result, Ukraine, the EU and OSCE declared that they would not recognise the “elections” in the DPR and LPR.⁶ The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Enzo Moavero Milanesi stated that they were “extremely concerned by the announcement of ‘elections’ due to be held in certain areas of Donetsk and Lugansk

¹ “Ukraine’s Prosecutor General Classifies Self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk Republics as Terrorist Organizations”, *Kyiv Post*, 16 May (2014), <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/war-against-ukraine/ukraines-prosecutor-general-classifies-self-declared-donetsk-and-luhansk-republics-as-terrorist-organizations-348212.html>.

² “Protocol on the Results of Consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group, Signed in Minsk, 5 September 2014”, *OSCE*, 5 September (2014), <https://www.osce.org/home/123257>.

³ “Secretary-General Deplores Unconstitutional Elections Called by Armed Rebel Groups in Ukraine”, *United Nations*, 29 October (2014), <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm16291.doc.htm>.

⁴ “So-called Elections not in Line with Minsk Protocol, Says OSCE Chair, Calling for Enhanced Efforts and Dialogue to Implement All Commitments”, *OSCE*, 31 October (2014), <https://www.osce.org/cio/126242>.

⁵ “O naznachenii vneocherednykh vyborov Glavy Donetskoy Narodnoy Respubliki i ocherednykh vyborov deputatov Narodnogo Soveta Donetskoy Narodnoy Respubliki”, *Narodny Sovet DNR*, 7 September (2018), <https://dnrsovet.su/doc/post/1048P-NS.pdf>; “Narodny Sovet naznchil vybory deputatov parlamenta i glavy LNR na 11 noyabrya”, *TsIK LNR*, 7 September (2018), <https://tsiklnr.su/news/287-narodnyy-sovet-naznachil-vybory-deputatov-parlamenta-i-glavy-lnr-na-11-noyabrya.html>.

⁶ “Fake Elections in Donbas Will Not Have Any Legal Force and Will Not Be Recognized by the International Community – President”, *President of Ukraine*, 1 November (2018), <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/cherhovi-fejkovi-vibori-nadonbasi-ne-matimut-zhodnoyi-yurid-50734>; “Statement on the Announcement of ‘Elections’ in the So-called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ and ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’”, *European External Action Service*, 8 September (2018), https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50243/statement-announcement-elections-so-called-luhansk-peoples-republic-and-donetsk-peoples_en; “OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Moavero Milanesi Extremely Concerned by Announced ‘Elections’ in Certain Areas of Donetsk and Lugansk, Ukraine”, *OSCE*, 8 November (2018), <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/402440>.

on 11 November”, adding that “such a decision would run counter to the letter and the spirit of the Minsk agreements”.⁷ The EU considered the “elections” in the DPR and LPR as “illegal and illegitimate” and condemned them as they were “in breach of international law, undermine[d] the commitments taken under the Minsk agreements and violate[d] Ukraine’s sovereignty and law”.⁸

Russian authorities, however, disagreed with the international approaches to the “elections” in the DPR and LPR. According to Maria Zakharova, an official representative of Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the “elections” allegedly had nothing to do with the Minsk agreements.⁹ In her argument, she referred not to the Minsk Protocol, but to the so-called Minsk II, an agreement signed in February 2015. While differing from the Minsk Protocol, the Minsk II agreement, nevertheless, referred to “elections in accordance with the Ukrainian legislation and the Law of Ukraine ‘On temporary Order of Local Self-Governance in Particular Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts’”.¹⁰



Source: <https://dnr-online.ru/menya-raduet-cto-respublika-razvivaetsya-mezhdunarodnyj-nablyudatel-iz-frantsii-dzhulian-roshedi/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on the ‘Elections’ Planned in the So-called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ and ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ for 11 November 2018”, *Council of the European Union*, 10 November (2018), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/11/10/declaration-of-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-elections-planned-in-the-so-called-luhansk-people-s-republic-and-donetsk-people-s-republic-for-11-november-2018/>.

⁹ “Zakharova: predstoyashchie vybory v Donbasse ne imeyut otnosheniya k minskim soglasheniyam”, *TASS*, 1 November (2018); <https://tass.ru/politika/5748150>.

¹⁰ “Kompleks mer po vypolneniyu Minskikh soglasheniy”, *OSCE*, 12 February (2015); <https://www.osce.org/ru/cio/140221>.

In the international evaluations of the legitimacy of the “elections” in the DPR and LPR, no established Western or international organisation sent any observers to monitor the “elections” in the DPR and LPR. Interestingly, the Russian official bodies also decided not to send any observers to either DPR or LPR. As the deputy head of the Russian Central Election Commission Nikolay Bulaev stated, they were not invited to monitor the “elections” and did not have agreements with the relevant offices in the DPR and LPR.¹¹

“International observers” in the DPR and LPR

In November 2014, the “general elections” in the DNR and LNR were “monitored” by around 45 international “observers” coming from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, USA, and so-called South Ossetia, a partially recognised breakaway “republic” located within the internationally recognised borders of Georgia. The international “observation” was, at that time, coordinated by three main organisations: (1) Russia-based Civic Control Association headed by Aleksandr Brod, (2) Belgium-based Eurasian Observatory of Democracy and Elections headed by a far-right activist Luc Michel (the “observation” mission was, however, coordinated by Fabrice Beaur), and (3) European Centre for Geopolitical Analysis run by a far-right politician Mateusz Piskorski, who would be later arrested by the Polish police on suspicion of participating in the activities of the Russian civilian intelligence directed against the Republic of Poland.

In 2018, international “observation” in the DPR and LPR was officially regulated by the rulings given by “central election committees” (CEC) of the DPR and LPR. The DPR CEC gave such a ruling on 20 September 2018,¹² while the LPR CEC did the same on 9 October 2018.¹³ Both rulings, referred to the “laws” of the respective “republics” and, to a significant degree, differed – especially annexes to those rulings – in contents. For example, the DPR’s ruling held that only those individuals who did not live on the territory of the DPR could be an international observer, while the LPR’s ruling did not have such a provision.

On 6 November, the LPR CEC announced that the “elections” would be monitored by 45 “international observers” from Abkhazia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Ireland, Kongo, Netherlands, Norway, Palestine, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, South Ossetia, Syria, Turkey, USA and Yemen.¹⁴ The DPR CEC made a similar announcement on 7 November stating that it accredited 48 “foreign observers” from Abkhazia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, South Ossetia and Turkey.¹⁵

¹¹ “V TsIK Rossii zayavili, chto ne budut nablyudat’ za vyborami v DNR i LNR”, *Rossiia Segodnya*, 31 October (2018), <https://ria.ru/politics/20181031/1531848634.html>.

¹² “Postanovlenie #10 ot 20.09.2018”, *TsIK DNR*, 20 September (2018), <https://cikdnr.su/postanovlenie-10-ot-20-09-2018/>.

¹³ “Postanovlenie #57 ot 09 oktyabrya 2018 goda”, *TsIK LNR*, 10 October (2018), <https://tsiklnr.su/news/412-postanovlenie-57-ot-09-oktyabrya-2018-goda.html>.

¹⁴ “Observers from 22 Countries Confirm Readiness to Arrive in LPR for Nov 11 Elections – CEC”, *Lugansk Media Centre*, 6 November (2018), <http://en.lug-info.com/news/one/observers-from-22-countries-confirm-readiness-to-arrive-in-lpr-for-nov-11-elections-cec-19606>.

¹⁵ “TsIK zaregistroval mezhdunarodnykh nablyudateley na vneocherednykh vyborakh Glavy DNR i deputatov Narodnogo Soveta”, *TsIK DNR*, 7 November (2018), <https://cikdnr.su/2018/11/07/cik-zaregistroval-mezhdunarodnyh-nablyudatelej-na-vneocherednyh-vyborah-glavy-dnr-i-deputatov-narodnogo-soveta/>.

Neither the DPR CEC nor the LPR CEC has published full lists of the “international observers” at the “general elections”, the analysis of the DPR, LPR and Russian media, as well as social networks and other publicly available sources, allowed us to identify 39 out of 48 “observers” in the case of the DPR (see Table 1), and 43 out of 48 “observers” in the case of the LPR (see Table 2).

Table 1. Identified international “observers” at the “general elections” in the DPR

No.	Country	Name	Affiliation/work
1.	“Abkhazia”	Oleg Nurievich Arshba	Deputy Foreign Minister
2.	“Abkhazia”	Tamaz Yurievich Gogiya	Chairman of the Central Election Committee
3.	Austria	Patrick Poppel	Suvorov Institute
4.	Belgium	Kris Roman	Euro-Rus association
5.	Belgium	Jan Penris	Flemish Interest; member of the Chamber of Representatives of the Federal Parliament of Belgium
6.	Chile	Isaac Márquez	*unknown
7.	Finland	Johan Bäckman	*unknown
8.	France	François Mauld d’Aymée	Donetsk Symphony Orchestra
9.	France	Nicolas Dhuicq	The Republicans
10.	France	Andréa Kotarac	Unbowed France; member of the regional council of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes.
11.	France	Thierry Mariani	The Republicans
12.	France	Nikola Mirkovic	Association “West – East”
13.	France	Xavier Moreau	Sokol Holding
14.	France	Christelle Neant	DONi International Press Center
15.	France	Julien Rochedy	*unknown
16.	France	Alexis Tarrade	The Republicans
17.	France	Quentin Vercruysse	The Republicans
18.	France	Michel Voisin	The Republicans
19.	Germany	Richard Gretzinger	Alternative for Germany
20.	Germany	Artur Leier	The Left
21.	Germany	Gunnar Norbert Lindemann	Alternative for Germany; member of the Berlin state parliament
22.	Germany	Manuel Ochsenreiter	Editor of Magazine <i>Zuerst!</i>
23.	Greece	Kostas Isihos	Syryza; former Deputy Minister of National Defence
24.	Italy	Eliseo Bertolasi	*unknown
25.	Italy	Giulietto Chiesa	*unknown
26.	Italy	Alessandro Musolino	Forward Italy
27.	Italy	Antonio Razzi	Forward Italy
28.	Italy	Palmarino Zoccatelli	League; vice president of the Veneto-Russia Cultural Association

29.	Netherlands	Pascal Hillebrand	*unknown
30.	Russia	Olga Fyodorovna Kovitidi	Member of the Federation Council
31.	Russia	Andrey Dmitrievich Kozenko	United Russia, Member of the State Duma
32.	Russia	Dmitriy Vadimovich Sablin	United Russia, Member of the State Duma
33.	Russia	Kazbek Kutsukovich Taysayev	Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Member of the State Duma
34.	Russia	Sergey Pavlovich Tsekov	Member of the Federation Council
35.	Russia	Viktor Petrovich Vodolatskiy	United Russia, Member of the State Duma
36.	Russia	Aleksandr Andreyevich Yushchenko	Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Member of the State Duma
37.	“South Ossetia”	Igor Gedevanovich Chochiev	Member of the parliament of South Ossetia
38.	“South Ossetia”	Ruslan Zaurovich Tadeyev	Minister of State Property and Land Matters
39.	Turkey	Okay Deprem	Correspondent for the <i>Evrensel</i> newspaper

Table 2. Identified international “observers” at the “general elections” in the LPR

No.	Country	Country	Affiliation/work
1.	“Abkhazia”	Almaskhan Zurabovich Ardzinba	Member of the Parliament of Abkhazia
2.	“Abkhazia”	Georgiy Chichikoevich Dumava	Assistant to Foreign Minister of Abkhazia
3.	“Abkhazia”	Astamur Omarovich Logua	Member of the Parliament of Abkhazia
4.	“Abkhazia”	Astamur Rufetovich Pachaliya	Bloc of Opposition Forces; member of Abkhazia’s Central Election Committee
5.	“Abkhazia”	Aleksandr Alekseyevich Romanenko	*unknown
6.	Belgium	Frank Creyelman	Flemish Interest
7.	Belgium	Christian Verougstraete	Flemish Interest; former Member of the Flemish Parliament
8.	Brazil	Humberto Setembrino Corrêa Carvalho	Communist Party of Brazil
9.	Brazil	Nubem Medeiros	Communist Party of Brazil
10.	Brazil	Claudio Ribeiro	*unknown
11.	Canada	John Bosnitch	*unknown
12.	Finland	Jarmo Ekman	Finland-Novorossiia Friendship Society
13.	Finland	Jon Krister Hellevig	Hellevig, Klein & Usov Llc.
14.	Finland	Janus Putkonen	Director of the DONi International Press Center

15.	Germany	Olaf Kießling	Alternative for Germany; member of the Thuringian regional parliament
16.	Germany	Andreas Maurer	The Left, member of the regional council of Quakenbrück.
17.	Germany	Tatjana Aleksandrovna Raab-Alifanova	*unknown
18.	Germany	Marco Samm	Mod's Hair Freiburg
19.	Greece	Stathis Stavropoulos	*unknown
20.	Hungary	Tamás Gergő Samu	Jobbik
21.	Iraq	Mudihir Mohammed Avad Mudihir	Student at the Tambov State University
22.	Ireland	Francis Hughes	*unknown
23.	Netherlands	Ronald van Amerongen	*unknown
24.	Norway	Bjørn Ditlef Nistad	*unknown
25.	"Palestine"	Saleh Mosab	Head of the "Sadyg" Arab Cultural Centre
26.	Poland	Tomasz Małodobry	*unknown
27.	Russia	Aleksey Nikolayevich Didenko	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia; Member of the State Duma
28.	Russia	Sergey Aleksandrovich Shargunov	Communist Party of the Russian Federation; Member of the State Duma
29.	Russia	Mikhail Viktorovich Shchapov	Communist Party of the Russian Federation; Member of the State Duma
30.	Russia	Aleksandr Sergeyevich Starovoytov	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia; Member of the State Duma
31.	Russia	Olga Viktorovna Timofeyeva	United Russia; deputy Chair of the State Duma
32.	Russia	Aleksey Aleksandrovich Zhuravlyov	Motherland/United Russia; Member of the State Duma
33.	Serbia	Zoran Krstić	*unknown
34.	Serbia	Ninoslav Milošević	*unknown
35.	Serbia	Miodrag Zarković	*unknown
36.	"South Ossetia"	David Otarovich Gazzaev	Assistant to President of South Ossetia
37.	"South Ossetia"	Igor Vakhtangovich Kozaev	Presidential Administration of South Ossetia
38.	"South Ossetia"	Bakhva Otarovich Tedeyev	*unknown
39.	Syria	Sa'ed Ibrahim Haneef	Student at the Mordovian State University
40.	USA	George Eliason	*unknown
41.	Yemen	Al Khasheb Rashid Abdulkudos	Student at the Orel State University

42.	*unknown	Mohamed Ali Sanaa Omer Abdel Bagi	Student at the Lugansk Taras Shevchenko National University
43.	*unknown	Ljubomir Radinović	Motherland party; chairman of the Society of Russian-Serbian-Montenegrin Friendship

Established involvement of “international observers” in pro-Kremlin efforts

The overwhelming majority of non-Russian “international observers” who “monitored” the “general elections” in the DPR and LPR have a record of previous involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts that involve, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and elsewhere;
- legitimisation and justification of the actions of the Russian Federation directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (illegal visits to Russia-annexed Crimea and occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine);
- criticism of the American and European sanctions imposed on Russia in relation to its aggression towards Ukraine;
- cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik, etc.);
- membership in Western and Russian pro-Kremlin organisations, movements and groups.



Andreas Maurer (right). Source: <http://lug-info.com/news/one/luganskaya-narodnaya-respublika-sostoyalas-kak-gosudarstvo-nablyudatel-iz-germanii-foto-40069>

Convicted electoral fraudster¹⁶ **Andreas Maurer**, the head of German far-left Die Linke (The Left) party group of the Quakenbrück parliament, has illegally travelled to Crimea several times since June 2016 and, during his first visit, suggested that the Osnabrück parliament could recognise the “Russian status” of Crimea. **Maurer** is a regular commentator for the Russian state media, and – presenting himself as the leader of the “Public Diplomacy Germany” project – he travelled to the DPR in February 2018 to discuss “further cooperation opportunities [and] business partnership”.¹⁷ In March 2018, **Maurer** “monitored” the illegitimate Russian presidential election in Crimea.¹⁸

Artur Leier is a personal referent of a Member of the Hamburg Parliament Martin Dolzer from Die Linke. **Leier** illegally visited Crimea in March 2018 as a participant of the Forum “Russia – a Country of Opportunities” and took part in the Russian propaganda event titled “Fourth Yalta International Economic Forum” in April 2018.

Johan Bäckman is a long-time pro-Kremlin political activist who was sentenced, in October 2018, to one-year conditional imprisonment for unlawful persecution, gross negligence and incitement to gross negligence related to a Finnish journalist who investigated the activities of the Russian “troll factory”. He observed the illegitimate “referendum” in Crimea in March 2014, “primary regional elections” in the DPR in October 2016, and Russian illegitimate “presidential election” in Crimea in March 2018. In May 2014, **Bäckman** declared himself a representative of the DPR in Finland. In May 2016, he participated in the “Donbass Struggle for Independence” roundtable held in Donetsk. For his blatant pro-Kremlin activities elsewhere, **Bäckman** was banned from entering Estonia and Moldova in 2009 and 2014 respectively.

Despite the DPR’s ruling on “international observers” that identified them as foreign individuals not living on the territory of the “republic”, the DPR CEC presumably allowed at least four “international observers” to violate this ruling. A French journalist **Christelle Neant** and a Chilean volunteer fighter **Isaac Márquez** have been living in the DPR since 2016 and even obtained the DPR’s “passports” in 2016 and 2017 respectively. A French volunteer fighter **François Mauld d’Aymée** arrived in the DPR in 2015 and is now a singer at the Donetsk Symphony Orchestra. Dutch volunteer fighter **Pascal Hillebrand** has been living in the DPR with his family since 2017 and he applied for the DPR’s “citizenship”.

French former MP **Thierry Mariani** is the head of the openly pro-Kremlin French-Russian Dialogue Association. In April 2015, he travelled to Moscow where he declared that the EU’s “anti-Russian” sanctions had to be lifted. In July 2015, he illegally travelled to Crimea as a member of a French delegation that included, inter alia, **Nicolas Dhuicq** and **Michel Voisin**. In September 2017, **Mariani**, **Dhuicq** and **Voisin** participated in the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in

¹⁶ Von Jean-Charles Fays, “Quakenbrücker Wahlfälschung: Andreas Maurer verurteilt”, *Bersenbrücker Kreisblatt*, 11 June (2018), <https://www.noz.de/lokales/samtgemeinde-bersenbrueck/artikel/1257710/quakenbruecker-wahlfaelschung-andreas-maurer-verurteilt>.

¹⁷ “Zakharchenko Meets Politicians and Social Activists from Russia, Germany and Norway”, *DAN*, 19 February (2018), <https://dan-news.info/en/world-en/zakharchenko-meets-politicians-and-social-activists-from-russia-germany-and-norway.html>.

¹⁸ See Anton Shekhovtsov, “Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate Presidential Election in Crimea in March 2018”, *European Platform for Democratic Elections*, 3 April (2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/foreign-observation-of-the-illegitimate-presidential-election-in-crimea-in-march-2018-1375.html>.

Russia, and, in March 2018, **Mariani** observed the Russian 2018 presidential election as a member of the political biased international monitoring mission.¹⁹



Thierry Mariani and Xavier Moreau. Source: <https://dnr-online.ru/ya-vizhu-cto-ukraina-stoporit-minskij-protsess-nablyudatel-iz-frantsii-terri-mariani/>

Representatives of The Republicans in Russia, **Quentin Vercruysse** and **Alexis Tarrade**, are commentators for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website.

Nikola Mirkovic, president of the Association “West – East” that claims to provide humanitarian help for the residents of Eastern Ukraine, is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled RT and Sputnik website.

Andréa Kotarac, a member of the regional council of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, illegally travelled to the DPR in May 2018 and met with its leadership. The meeting was also attended by **Manuel Ochsenreiter**, **Andreas Maurer**, **Gunnar Norbert Lindemann**, **Johan Bäckman** and **Eliseo Bertolasi**.

Former paratrooper officer **Xavier Moreau**, who holds dual French-Russian citizenship, owns the Moscow-based Sokol Holding that employs former members of French Army elite troops and Russian security services, as well as providing consultancy and security to French companies. **Moreau** played an important role in establishing contacts between the French far-right National Front party and Russian actors.

¹⁹ See Anton Shekhovtsov, “Politically Biased Foreign Electoral Observation at the Russian 2018 Presidential Election”, *European Platform for Democratic Elections*, 16 April (2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/documents/details/politically-biased-foreign-electoral-observation-at-the-russian-2018-presidential-election-1423.html>.

Julien Rochedy, the former leader of the National Front Youth, a youth wing of the French National Front, took part in the Russian propaganda event titled “Fourth Yalta International Economic Forum” held in Russia-annexed Crimea in April 2018.

Editor of the far-right magazine *Zuerst!* **Manuel Ochsenreiter** is a long-term pro-Kremlin activist. He is a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled RT and Sputnik website. He observed the illegitimate “referendum” in Crimea in March 2014, “general elections” in the DPR in November 2014, “primary regional elections” in the DPR in October 2016, and Russian illegitimate “presidential election” in Crimea in March 2018. In May 2015, **Ochsenreiter** participated in the propaganda event called “Donbass: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow” held in the DPR.

Richard Gretzinger, **Olaf Kießling** and **Gunnar Norbert Lindemann** are members of the German far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party that opposes the EU sanctions imposed on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine. **Gretzinger** is also a member of the “Russian Germans for the AfD” group within the AfD.

An Italian centre-right politician **Alessandro Musolino** was part of the politically biased international observation missions at the Russian 2011 parliamentary elections, Russian 2012 presidential election, Ukrainian 2012 parliamentary elections, illegitimate 2014 “parliamentary elections” in the DPR, Russian 2018 presidential election and Cambodian 2018 general elections. **Musolino** also took part in the conference “Donbass: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” that was held in Russia-occupied Donetsk in May 2015. **Musolino’s** fellow party member **Antonio Razzi** monitored the Cambodian 2018 general elections too, as part of the politically biased international observation mission organised by the Russian actors.

Eliseo Bertolasi is an associate researcher of the pro-Kremlin Institute of Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Auxiliary Sciences and correspondent of the Rossiya Segodnya news agency. He contributed to the development of the pro-Kremlin Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association established by the Italian far-right Northern League party. In October 2016, he observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR. Together with **Palmarino Zoccatelli**, **Bertolasi** participated in the “Donbass Struggle for Independence” roundtable held in Donetsk in May 2016. **Zoccatelli** is also vice-president of the Veneto branch of the pro-Kremlin Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association.

Patrick Poppel is the general secretary of the Austria-based pro-Kremlin Suvorov Institute. In 2006-2007, **Poppel** was a regular contributor to the Russian, fiercely anti-Western website Katehon established by the Russian ultranationalist businessman Konstantin Malofeev. In 2016, he demonstrated in Vienna holding a flag of the so-called Novorossiya (New Russia), a non-existent separatist state allegedly located within the internationally recognised borders of Ukraine. In January 2018, **Poppel** co-hosted a visit of Russian fascist Alexander Dugin to Vienna. He also monitored the Russian illegitimate “presidential election” in Crimea in March 2018.

Members of the Belgian far-right Flemish Interest party **Frank Creyelman**, **Jan Penris** and **Christian Verougstraete** observed the illegitimate “referendum” in Crimea in March 2014. **Penris** and **Creyelman** were part of the politically biased election observation mission at the Russian regional elections in September 2014, while **Creyelman** also observed the illegitimate 2014 “parliamentary elections” in the



DPR and was part of the politically biased observation mission at the Ukrainian 2012 parliamentary elections.

Belgian far-right activist **Kris Roman** is the leader of the fringe Euro-Rus association (possibly consisting of only Roman himself). He is a regular commentator for the pro-Kremlin media and participated in the “Donbass Struggle for Independence” roundtable held in Donetsk in May 2016. In September 2017, together with **Humberto Setembrino Corrêa Carvalho**, **Roman** participated in the pro-Kremlin conference “1917-2017. Russia, Ukraine and the World” in Moscow; they were also joined by **Janus Putkonen** and **Eliseo Bertolasi**. In November 2018, Roman took part - together with **Carvalho** and **Claudio Ribeiro** – in the anti-Western conference “Red Square/Molotov Club” in Moscow.

Okay Deprem is a correspondent for the Turkish newspaper *Evrensel*. In October 2016, he observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR. **Deprem** is also a co-author of the book *Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin: The Leader who Raised Russia* that, expectedly, offers praise of Putin.

Italian conspiracy theorist **Giulietto Chiesa** is a long-term supporter of the Kremlin’s policies and a regular contributor to the Italian edition of the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website. In December 2014, he was detained and then deported from Estonia for his apparent involvement in the Russian influence operations. In September 2016, he participated in the politically biased observation mission at the regional elections in Russia, and, in October the same year, **Chiesa** observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR.

Janus Putkonen is Director of the DONi International Press Center that was established in the DPR in July 2015 and became an official media resource of the DPR in September 2016. The same month, **Putkonen** was granted a “passport” of the DPR. He was responsible for providing the DPR’s “security services” with background analysis on journalists who wanted to enter the DPR’s territory.

John Bosnitch is a regular contributor to the Russian state-controlled media such as RT and Sputnik.

Serbian sports reporter **Miodrag Zarković** observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR in October 2016.

Polish activist **Tomasz Małodobry** illegally visited Luhansk in May 2018 and provides pro-separatist comments for the Russian media.

Although presented as a Serbian observer, **Ljubomir Radinović** has been living in the Russian city of Voronezh since 2000. He is the head of the regional branch of the Russian far-right Motherland party and chairman of the Society of Russian-Serbian-Montenegrin Friendship. In April 2018, he illegally visited the Luhansk Oblast as part of the Serbian delegation.

Jarmo Ekman claims to be the head of the Finland-Novorossiia Friendship Society. He illegally travelled to the DPR several times and observed the illegitimate “primary regional elections” in the DPR in October 2016.



Greek cartoonist **Stathis Stavropoulos** participated in a pro-Kremlin propaganda event called “Art and Politics” that took place in Athens in March 2017. The same event hosted Zakhar Prilepin, who at that time led one of the volunteer battalions in the DPR, and Russian observer Sergey Shargunov.

Bjørn Nistad is a long-term pro-Kremlin activist and a regular commentator for the Russian state-controlled Sputnik website.

Finnish businessman **Jon Krister Hellevig** has been working in Russia since the 1990s. He is a regular contributor to the Russian state-controlled RT and Sputnik.

Serbian activist **Ninoslav Milošević** is a former volunteer fighter who was sentenced to six months of home imprisonment for his participation in the Russian-Ukrainian war on the side of the DPR.

Foreign electoral observation as an instrument of propaganda

As the “elections” in the DPR and LPR were not considered legitimate by the international community, “international observers” were invited to the “republics” to provide a sense of general legitimacy and normalcy to the “elections” in the eyes of the domestic and Russian audiences. The major message was a logical fallacy that can be presented as: “legitimate and normal elections are monitored by foreign observers – the elections in the DPR and LPR are monitored by foreign observers, hence the elections are legitimate and normal”. To achieve this objective, the media of the DPR and LPR promoted specific narratives through the comments given by the “international observers” and disinformed the domestic and Russian audiences about the real international perception of the “general elections” in the “republics”. The visibility of “international observers” in the media of the DPR and LPR was very high. Out of 60 news stories published by the DPR’s “Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika” website (dnr-online.ru, DNR) on the voting day, i.e. 11 November 2018, 22 news stories (or almost 37%) were devoted to “international observers”. And, out of 88 news stories, published by the LPR’s “Lugansl Media Centre” (lug-info.com, LMC), 34 news stories (or almost 39%) talked about the “international observers”.

The analysis of the reports published before and during the “elections” showed that the media of the DPR and LPR promoted the following five major narratives:

1. The “general elections” had nothing to do with the Minsk agreements and did not run counter to them. The media of the DPR and LPR promoted this narrative most actively in the run-up to the elections, and, to promote it, the media used those individuals who resided in the “republics”. Therefore, before the “elections” took place, the media asked for comments about the Minsk agreements from the following “observers”: in the case of the LPR, those were Al Khasheb Rashid Abdulkudos, Janus

Putkonen, George Eliason and Ronald van Amerongen;²⁰ in the case of the DPR, those were Pascal Hillebrand, Isaac Márquez and Okay Deprem.²¹

2. The “general elections” were characterised by a very high turnout and active participation of the citizens of the DPR and LPR. This narrative was promoted most actively on the voting day, and especially in the LPR. Almost 65% of the news stories published by the LMC about “international observers” on 11 November stressed the high turnout and active participation, while the same was true only for 10% of the news stories published by the DNR.

3. The “general elections” took place in a calm and orderly manner. Again, this narrative was especially widespread in the LPR’s media.

4. The life in the DPR and LPR is safe and peaceful.

5. The international community should recognise the “general elections”, and – by extension – the sovereignty of the DPR and LPR.

Conclusion

As the holding of “general elections” in the DPR and LPR ran counter to the Minsk agreements, the international community considered those “elections” as illegitimate and did not send any observers to monitor them. In an attempt to fill the void of legitimacy, the “authorities” of the DPR and LPR claimed to have invited 48 and 45 “international observers” respectively.

Out of 39 identified “observers” in the case of the DPR, 24 were foreign politicians and state officials; out of the 43 identified “observers” in the case of the LPR, 20 were foreign politicians and state officials. Other “observers” were predominantly businessmen, students, journalists, and far-right and far-left activists and conspiracy theorists.

The overwhelming majority of non-Russian “international observers” who were present at the “general elections” in the two “republics” had already been involved in various pro-Kremlin efforts, such as: (1) previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions in Russia and elsewhere; (2) legitimisation and justification of Russia’s actions directed at undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; (3) criticism of the sanctions imposed on Russia in relation to its aggression towards Ukraine; (4) cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments

²⁰ “Vybory v LNR ne protivorechat Minskim soglasheniyam – mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli”, *Luganskiy informatsionny tsentr*, 31 October (2018), <http://lug-info.com/news/one/lnr-gotovitsya-k-vyboram-otkryto-i-s-soblyudeniem-osnovnykh-norm-demokratii-nablyudateli-39753>; “Zapad podmenyaet ponyatiya, govorya o protivorechii vyborov ‘Minsku’ – nablyudatel’ iz Finlyandii”, *Luganskiy informatsionny tsentr*, 6 November (2018), <http://lug-info.com/news/one/zapad-podmenyaet-ponyatiya-govorya-o-protivorechii-vyborov-minsku-nablyudatel-iz-finlyandii-39911>; “Predstoyashchie vybory v LNR ne protivorechat Minskim soglasheniyam – nablyudatel’ iz Niderlandov”, *Luganskiy informatsionny tsentr*, 30 October (2018), <http://lug-info.com/news/one/predstoyashchie-vybory-v-lnr-ne-protivorechat-minskim-soglasheniyam-nablyudatel-iz-niderlandov-39724>.

²¹ Tsesanna Antonenko, “Vybory v DNR 2018: mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli vysoko otsenili podgotovku Respubliki”, *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 1 November (2018), <https://www.donetsk.kp.ru/online/news/3283772/>.



of disinformation and propaganda (RT, Sputnik); (5) membership in pro-Kremlin movements, groups and organisations.

“International observers” were highly visible in the media space of the DPR and LPR: more than one-third of all news stories published on the voting day in the DNR and LMC mentioned “international observers”. They were invited to the DPR and LPR in order to provide a sense of general legitimacy and normalcy to the “elections” in the eyes of the domestic and Russian audiences. In a pursuit of this objective, the media of the DPR, LPR and Russia disinformed their audiences about the real international perception of the “general elections”, as well as promoting the following five major narratives: (1) the “elections” did not run counter to the Minsk agreements, and, therefore, were legitimate; (2) the “elections” were characterised by a high turnout and active participation; (3) the “elections” took place in a calm and orderly manner; (4) the life in the DPR and LPR is safe and peaceful; and (5) the international community should recognise the “elections”, as well as independence and sovereignty of the DPR and LPR.

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