



# UNDERMINING INSTITUTIONS:

## HOW THE KREMLIN INVOLVES INTERNATIONAL ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES IN FAKE OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES

Context, analysis, and recommendations by Łukasz Kondraciuk, Stefanie Schiffer

*Russia's local elections in September 2024, concentrated on the so-called Single Voting Day, were marked by unprecedented restrictions on independent opposition, media, and election observers. To legitimize the elected politicians in the eyes of the Russian voters and international audiences, the Russian Central Election Commission invited multiple representatives of state election commissions to Moscow and St. Petersburg. **All of them misused the authority of their institutions to lend legitimacy to these fraudulent elections.***

*Our research shows that the Kremlin increasingly targets election commissions from the Global South, strategically leveraging their participation to craft an image of broad international approval. By co-opting officials from these nations—often under the guise of technical exchanges or observer invitations—the Kremlin manipulates their credibility to validate undemocratic practices. These tactics undermine the integrity of these institutions and aim to shield Russia's electoral malpractice from global scrutiny.*

## CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

Russia's local elections in September 2024—the so-called Single Voting Day—prioritized the regime's control over true political competitiveness. Voting took place from September 6 to 8, both in person and online. Over 57 million voters were eligible, with over 35,000 seats contested across over 4,000 campaigns.

A notable innovation in these elections was the expanded use of remote electronic voting in 25 regions. Around 946,000 citizens opt for this method, which does not provide independent control over the voting process and is therefore disqualified as a “black box” by independent election observers. However, the system faced low engagement in some regions.

Several regions, notably Moscow, employed mixed electoral systems. However, some areas still held direct elections for governors, and all incumbents were eventually re-elected.

Fundamental legal changes for Russia's elections included disqualifying so-called foreign agents, de facto regime opponents, from passive voting rights and roles like candidate representatives or observers. Campaign financing was limited to 30% of the total fund before candidate registration, further complicating signature collection for candidates with no administrative resources backing them up. Detainees were able to vote outside their districts for the first time.

As noted above, the elections were primarily a means of consolidating centralized power even further. The United Russia party solidified its dominance across regional and municipal bodies, underscoring the system's controlled nature. Pseudo-opposition parties like LDPR, the Communist Party, and Just Russia operated as managed opposition, legitimizing a controlled process designed to maintain the status quo.

As documented by the independent Movement for Defence of Voters' Rights “Golos,” the 2024 regional elections in Russia were marked by significant irregularities and alleged falsifications. Despite a lack of real opposition, virtually only pro-regime candidates were allowed on the ballot.

According to their analysis, the regime widely used the „Geo-SMS” system to track and pressure voters, particularly those in the public sector, to confirm their participation and inflate turnout.

The analysts from Golos identified systematic severe violations in several regions, such as Kursk, Orenburg, and Saint Petersburg. These included ballot stuffing and manipulation of results<sup>1,2,3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Анализ региональных выборов ЕДГ-2024, часть 1, *Golos*, September 11 (2024), <https://golosinfo.org/articles/149522>

<sup>2</sup> Что нужно знать о едином дне голосования-2024, *Kommersant*, September 6 (2024), <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6953047>

<sup>3</sup> Победители и непообежденные, *Kommersant*, September 9 (2024), <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7028896>

## FAKE OBSERVERS

The fake observation phenomenon is a tool of political disinformation that pretends to monitor elections by groups and individuals who lack independence and credibility. These missions often align with non-democratic regimes and issue favorable statements for local mass media even when elections have evident irregularities. The aim is to legitimize flawed elections and counter criticism from credible organizations like OSCE/ODIHR, predominantly due to domestic propaganda in the host country. Unlike legitimate observers, these groups offer little transparency and ignore international standards and election observation methodologies. Per EPDE's experience, fake observers focus on creating a false sense of legitimacy for non-democratic regimes, undermining efforts to ensure fair and democratic elections.

EPDE defines fake observers as individuals who participate in election observation as accredited or non-accredited observers or 'experts' meeting any of the following criteria:<sup>4</sup>

- They fail to denounce the elections as short of meeting democratic standards despite ODIHR/OSCE monitoring missions or independent domestic election observers deeming them such.
- They make statements or comments that lend legitimacy to the elections, contradicting the assessments of the aforementioned observation reports.
- They are likely to have political, economic, or other conflicts of interest that would interfere with conducting observations impartially.
- Their activities are restricted to short-term or isolated observations without clear and public acknowledgment of the limited scope of their work or conclusions. They fail to issue public reports on their findings and do not inform publicly about their methodology
- They are likely to have travel and/or accommodation costs paid by governments, domestic politicians, or other domestic political actors or by individuals or organizations related to those individuals.
- Their presence can be confirmed by a picture or statement from a media outlet.

The European Platform for Democratic Elections has been actively uncovering fake observation missions, and EPDE's work includes thorough research and open-source investigations to reveal the role of these so-called observers. EPDE has exposed more than 700 individuals who undertook efforts to legitimize flawed elections in various countries between 2015 and 2024, including:

2015

- Local & Regional Election Ukraine
- Referendum Election Armenia
- Parliamentary Election Azerbaijan

2016

- Referendum Election Azerbaijan

2017

- Local & Regional Election Russia

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<sup>4</sup> See EPDE's methodology to identify fake observers: <https://www.fakeobservers.org/fake-election-observers/methodology.html>

## 2018

- Local & Regional Election Russia
- Presidential Election Russia
- Presidential Election Russia (Occupied Crimea)
- Presidential Election Russia (Occupied Territories of Ukraine)
- Presidential Election Azerbaijan
- Presidential Election Unrecognized Donetsk People's Republic
- Presidential Election Unrecognized Lugansk People's Republic
- Presidential Election Zimbabwe
- Local & Regional Election Cambodia

## 2019

- Local & Regional Election Russia
- Parliamentary Election Unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia
- Presidential Election Unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia

## 2020

- Parliamentary Election Azerbaijan
- Plebiscite Election Russia
- Plebiscite Election Russia (Occupied Crimea)

## 2021

- Parliamentary Election Russia
- Parliamentary Election Russia (Occupied Crimea)

## 2022

- Local & Regional Election Ukraine (Occupied Territories of Ukraine)
- Parliamentary Election Hungary

## 2023

- Local & Regional Election Ukraine (Occupied Territories of Ukraine)

## 2024

- Local & Regional Election Russia (including Occupied Territories of Ukraine)
- Presidential Election Russia (including Occupied Territories of Ukraine)

## INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF MEMBERS OF INTERNATIONAL ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES

The 2024 Russian local elections saw a general absence of independent observers, with only a few foreign persons present. EPDE's OSINT experts identified all of these individuals as coming from election management bodies from the Global South.

During the presidential elections in March 2024, the Kremlin invited two representatives from European election management bodies who publicly gave positive assessments of the election process<sup>5</sup>. With the continued invitation of experts from international election management bodies, the Kremlin is trying to establish a new trend.<sup>6</sup> The Kremlin clearly strives to profit from the authority of these institutions in its efforts to mislead Russian public opinion on the true character of the manipulated election process. At the same time, the invitation underscores a deliberate strategy by Putin's regime to build and cultivate stronger ties with the Global South. Russia positions itself as a central regional power in a multipolar world, overall playing into a broader narrative of legitimacy for the regime at home and abroad, countering criticism from credible domestic and international organizations, and reinforcing Russia's geopolitical ambitions.

EPDE monitored the Russian media and other sources during the three election days and has noticed that Russia's Central Electoral Commission invited six counterparts from five electoral institutions<sup>7,12</sup>:

- SPR Election Commission of Malaysia;
- INE Instituto Nacional Electoral (Mexico);
- COMELEC Commission on Elections (Philippines);
- ECSL Electoral Commission (Sierra Leone);
- IEC Electoral Commission (South Africa).

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<sup>5</sup> See EPDE's Report: Fake International Observers and Experts at Russia's Fraudulent 2024 "Presidential Election", [https://epde.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EPDE\\_2024\\_FakeObservers\\_russia\\_updated.pdf](https://epde.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EPDE_2024_FakeObservers_russia_updated.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> This practice was also observed during the snap parliamentary elections on September 1, 2024. The Azerbaijani government led by President Ilham Aliyev invited five representatives from central election commissions, including representatives of central election commissions from Latvia and Bulgaria. Read more about fake observation in Azerbaijan's snap parliamentary elections 2024 in EPDE's report: [https://epde.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/EPDE\\_reportA5\\_Azer-International-help\\_EN\\_SCREEN.pdf](https://epde.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/EPDE_reportA5_Azer-International-help_EN_SCREEN.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> *Russian Free Elections Foundation / Российский Фонд Свободных Выборов* on Telegram, September 8 (2024), [https://t.me/RFSV\\_2022/5716](https://t.me/RFSV_2022/5716)

The group appeared first on September 6, 2024 in Moscow during a conference<sup>8,9,10,11</sup> of Russia's Central Electoral Commission chairperson Ella Pamfilova, then on September 7 they traveled to St. Petersburg<sup>12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20</sup>.

In St. Petersburg, the group was met by Maxim Meiksin, head<sup>21</sup> of St. Petersburg's Electoral Commission, as well as Irina Sokolova<sup>18</sup>, member<sup>22</sup> of the State Duma (Russia's parliament) and Maxim Voronin, head of the Youth Electoral Commission of St. Petersburg<sup>23</sup> and chairperson of the federal chapter of the Union of Youth Electoral Commissions of Russia<sup>24</sup>. The group visited at least one polling station<sup>19</sup> in St. Petersburg on October 8, 2024.

All the information about this visit is from Russian outlets. We have not found any mentions on the websites and channels of the foreign electoral bodies, nor on the social network accounts of those of their representatives we could identify.

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<sup>8</sup> Памфилова: Для наблюдения за выборами в регионах РФ заявили 170 тыс. человек, *Rg.ru*, September 6 (2024), <https://rg.ru/2024/09/06/pamfilova-dlia-nabliudeniia-za-vyborami-v-regionah-rf-zaiavilis-170-tys-chelovek.html>

<sup>9</sup> Номенклатура on Telegram, September 6 (2024), <https://t.me/nomenclatura/12706>

<sup>10</sup> В России стартовали выборы разных уровней, *Первый Канал*, September 6 (2024), [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2024-09-06/485373-v\\_rossii\\_startovali\\_vybory\\_raznyh\\_urovney](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2024-09-06/485373-v_rossii_startovali_vybory_raznyh_urovney)

<sup>11</sup> Более 170 тыс наблюдателей следят за ходом ЕДГ в эти дни, *РАПСИ*, September 6 (2024), [https://www.rapsinews.ru/election\\_right\\_news/20240906/310222451.html](https://www.rapsinews.ru/election_right_news/20240906/310222451.html)

<sup>12</sup> Максим Мейксин on Telegram, October 7 (2024), <https://t.me/Meyksin/1536>

<sup>13</sup> Максим Мейксин on Telegram, October 7 (2024), <https://t.me/Meyksin/1542>

<sup>14</sup> Санкт-Петербургская избирательная комиссия on Telegram, October 7 (2024), <https://t.me/izbircomspb/2432>

<sup>15</sup> Максим Мейксин встретился с международными электоральными экспертами, *spbndevnik.ru*, October 7 (2024), <https://spbndevnik.ru/news/2024-09-07/maksim-meyksin-vstretilsya-s-mezhdunarodnymi-elektoralnymi-ekspertami>

<sup>16</sup> Медиацентр «Выборы-2024» on Telegram, October 7 (2024), <https://t.me/mediacenter2024/439>

<sup>17</sup> Представители иностранных избирательных органов поделились впечатлениями от российских электоральных процессов, *Вечерний Санкт-Петербург*, October 7 (2024), <https://vecherka-spb.ru/2024/09/07/predstaviteli-inostrannikh-izbiratelnykh-organov-podelilis-vpechatleniyami-ot-rossiiskikh-elektoralnykh-protsessov>

<sup>18</sup> Эксперты из Мексики, ЮАР и Малайзии и Филиппин побывали в Центре общественного наблюдения за выборами в Петербурге, *Электронная версия газеты «Петербургский район»*, October 7 (2024), <https://primorsknews.ru/2024/09/07/mezhdunarodnie-eksperti-poznakomilis-s-rabotoi-tsentra-obshchestvennogo-nablyudeniya-za-viborami-v-peterburge>

<sup>19</sup> Международные эксперты посетили участковые избиркомы в Пушкинском районе, Телеканал Санкт-Петербург, October 8 (2024), <https://tvspb.ru/news/2024/09/8/mezhdunarodnye-eksperty-posetili-uchastkovye-izbirkomy-v-pushkinskom-rajone>

<sup>20</sup> Медиацентр «Выборы-2024» on Telegram, September 7 (2024), <https://t.me/mediacenter2024/428>

<sup>21</sup> Мейксин Максим Семенович биография и пресс-портрет, *whoiswho.dp.ru*, <https://whoiswho.dp.ru/cart/person/1932738>

<sup>22</sup> Парламентарии стран Содружества дали оценку прошедшим парламентским выборам в Азербайджане, *IPA-CIS*, September 1 (2004), <https://t.me/mediacenter2024/428>

<sup>23</sup> Молодежная избирательная комиссия Петербурга выбрала первого среди равных, *spbndevnik.ru*, February 15 (2023) <https://spbndevnik.ru/news/2023-02-15/molodezhnaya-izbiratelnaya-komissiya-peterburga-vybrala-pervogo-sredi-ravnyh>

<sup>24</sup> Russian Foundation for Free Elections on VK, [https://vk.com/video-152199379\\_456240096](https://vk.com/video-152199379_456240096)

<sup>25</sup> Interpreters and translators from 23 countries meet at the International School on Translation and Interpreting held at St Petersburg University, *St Petersburg University*, February 9 (2023), <https://english.spbu.ru/news-events/news/interpreters-and-translators-23-countries-meet-international-school-translation-and>

## PARTICIPANTS

- **Marisa Arlene Cabral Porchas**

Name	Country	Observing mission	Affiliation
Marisa Arlene Cabral Porchas Мариса Арлене Кабраль Порчас	Mexico	Counterpart electoral bodies invited by Russia’s CEC	INE Instituto Nacional Electoral <sup>26</sup>

Marisa Arlene Cabral Porchas was seen in Moscow<sup>10</sup> on October 6, 2024, and in St. Petersburg<sup>13,14,16,17,19</sup> on October 7 and 8. Marisa Arlene Cabral Porchas serves<sup>26</sup> as Coordinator of International Affairs at Mexico’s Instituto Nacional Electoral. Before that, she was a member of the executive district board in Sonora, Mexico<sup>27</sup>. Pictures and videos featuring Marisa Arlene Cabral Porchas are available in the sources linked in footnotes<sup>10,13,14,16,17,19,26,27</sup>. Russian media outlets quoted Marisa Arlene Cabral Porchas:

*“The electoral process in Russia is organized at a very high level. It is transparent and objective.”<sup>20</sup>*

*“In Mexico we say: “The one who gets the most votes wins. And only the majority determines who wins.” The Central Election Commission does everything possible to ensure transparency of the electoral processes. The voice of every voter will be heard, we have no doubt about it.”<sup>20</sup>*

*“The Russian government is making great efforts to hold elections at the highest level. This is the key to the stability of the electoral process and a guarantee of compliance with democratic principles.”<sup>20</sup>*

*«Избирательный процесс в России организован на очень высоком уровне. Он отличается прозрачностью и объективностью.»<sup>20</sup>*

*«В Мексике мы говорим: «Выигрывает тот, кто получает большинство голосов. И только большинство определяет того, кто выиграет». ЦИК делает все возможное, чтобы обеспечить прозрачность, транспарентность избирательных процессов. Голос каждого избирателя будет услышан, сомнений у нас в этом нет.»<sup>20</sup>*

*«Правительство РФ прикладывает большие усилия, чтобы провести выборы на самом высоком уровне. Именно это является залогом стабильности избирательного процесса и гарантией соблюдения демократических принципов.»<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>26</sup> Mtra. Marisa Arlene Cabral Porchas, *INE Instituto Nacional Electoral*, <https://ine.mx/marisa-arlene-cabral-porchas/>

<sup>27</sup> Taddei tropieza en intentona de nombramientos clave en el INE, *Lasilla Rota*, June 21 (2023), <https://lasillarota.com/nacion/2023/6/21/taddei-tropieza-en-intentona-de-nombramientos-clave-en-el-ine-434353.html>

“Marisa Arlene Cabral Porchas, coordinator of international cooperation at the National Electoral Council of Mexico, like others, noted the high level of organization of the electoral process in the Russian Federation, its transparency and objectivity. Porchas believes that the government’s efforts to ensure a high level of elections were “a guarantee of stability of the electoral process and a guarantee of compliance with democratic principles.”<sup>17</sup>

«Мариса Арлене Кабраль Порчас, координатор по вопросам международного сотрудничества Национального избирательного совета Мексики, также как и другие отметила высокий уровень организации избирательного процесса в РФ, его прозрачность и объективность. Порчас считает, что усилия правительства по обеспечению высокого уровня проведения выборов явились «залогом стабильности избирательного процесса и гарантией соблюдения демократических принципов»<sup>17</sup>.

- **Genesis Marquez Gatdula**

Name	Country	Observing mission	Affiliation
Genesis Marquez Gatdula Генезис Маркес Гатдула	Philippines	Counterpart electoral bodies invited by Russia’s CEC	COMELEC Commission on Elections <sup>17,28,29</sup>

Genesis Marquez Gatdula was seen both in Moscow<sup>10</sup> on October 6, 2024 and in St. Petersburg<sup>13,14,16,17,19</sup> on October 7 and 8. Genesis Marquez Gatdula serves<sup>17</sup> as the director of the organization department of the Commission on Elections of the Philippines, and was mentioned as “clerk of the commission”<sup>28</sup>. Pictures and videos featuring Genesis Marquez Gatdula are available in the sources linked in footnotes<sup>10,13,16,16,19,19</sup>. Russian media outlets quoted Genesis Marquez Gatdula:

“Genesis Marquez Gatdula, Director of the Organization Department of the Commission on Elections of the Philippines, noted the excellent work of the CEC and the Russian government, especially emphasizing the importance of involving youth in the electoral process. “The Russian authorities are successfully implementing the constitutionally guaranteed right of every person to vote in elections,” said Genesis Marques Gatdula.”<sup>17</sup>

«Генезис Маркес Гатдула, директор организационного департамента Комиссии по выборам Филиппин, отметил отличные результаты работы ЦИК и российского правительства, особенно подчеркнул важность привлечения молодёжи к выборному процессу. «Российские власти успешно реализуют гарантированное Конституцией право каждого человека проголосовать на выборах», — рассказал Генезис Маркес Гатдула.»<sup>17</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Comelec denies revoking Puerto Princesa mayor's candidacy, *Philippine News Agency*, August 11 (2024), <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1181140>



“The election process in Russia is very well organized. Even before the meeting with the Chairperson of the St. Petersburg Electoral Commission, Mr. Meiksin, we had time to see everything: the work of observers, the work of information systems, we also had a video conference, and most importantly, we saw how people come to the polling stations and vote. Based on all this, we can say that the CEC and the Russian government are doing an excellent job.”<sup>20</sup>

“Both the Central Election Commission and the Russian government are actively involving young people in the electoral process, and this is right, because young people are the future reserve.”<sup>20</sup>

“The Russian authorities are successfully implementing the constitutionally guaranteed right of every person to vote in elections.”<sup>20</sup>

«Выборный процесс в России очень хорошо организован. Еще до встречи с председателем Санкт-Петербургской избирательной комиссии господином Мейксиным мы успели увидеть все: и работу наблюдателей, и работу информационных систем, также у нас была видеоконференция, а главное — мы видели, как люди приходят на участки и голосуют. На основании всего этого мы можем сказать, что ЦИК и российское правительство отлично справляются со своей работой.»<sup>20</sup>

«Как ЦИК, так и правительство России активно привлекают молодежь к выборному процессу, и это правильно, потому что молодые люди — это будущий резерв.»<sup>20</sup>

«Российские власти успешно реализуют гарантированное Конституцией право каждого человека проголосовать на выборах.»<sup>20</sup>

- **Socorro B. Inting**

Name	Country	Observing mission	Affiliation
Socorro B. Inting	Philippines	Counterpart electoral bodies invited by Russia’s CEC	COMELEC Commission on Elections <sup>33,31,33</sup>

Socorro B. Inting was seen in Moscow<sup>10</sup> on October 6, 2024 and in St. Petersburg<sup>13,14,19</sup> on October 7 and 8. None of the Russian sources we have found mentions her name, but the physical resemblance seems strong enough to confirm the identification. Socorro B. Inting serves<sup>30,31</sup> as one of the commissioners of the Philippines’s Commission on Elections (COMELEC). Before joining the commission, she was a Court of Appeals

<sup>29</sup> COMELEC on Facebook, November 10 (2023), <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=737468901752278&set=a.224420856390421>

<sup>30</sup> Present Members of the Commission, *Commission on Elections*, <https://comelec.gov.ph/?r=AboutCOMELEC/CommissionMembers>

<sup>31</sup> Who is Socorro Inting, Comelec’s new acting chairperson? *Rappler.com*, February 3 (2022), <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/elections/things-to-know-socorro-inting-comelec/>

associate justice with 20 years of service in the judiciary<sup>32</sup>. She was initially appointed<sup>33</sup> to COMELEC in May 2018, then resigned, then was reappointed<sup>33</sup> in June 2022. Pictures and videos featuring Socorro B. Inting are available in the sources linked in footnotes<sup>10,13,14,19,31,33</sup>

- **Alex Saffa**

Name	Country	Observing mission	Affiliation
Alex Saffa Алекс Саффа	Sierra Leone	Counterpart electoral bodies invited by Russia’s CEC	ECSL Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone <sup>17,34</sup>

Alex Saffa (full name<sup>34</sup>: Alex Pat Labib Saffa) was seen only in St. Petersburg<sup>13,14,16,17,19</sup> on October 7, 2024. According to Russian sources<sup>17</sup>, he serves as an Executive Assistant at the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL). One other source<sup>35</sup>, however not very trustworthy (a Facebook profile of an opposition group exiled in Kuwait, apparently) confirms this function. Alex Saffa’s name is mentioned in the 2021 report of the ECSL<sup>34</sup>, but without the function. On his X/Twitter profile<sup>36</sup>, Alex Saffa states that he lives in London. Pictures and a video featuring Alex Saffa are available in the sources linked in footnotes<sup>13,14,16,17,19,36</sup>. Russian media outlets quoted Alex Saffa:

*“The Russian electoral system is one of the best I have seen, and I have traveled a lot to different countries. We were very impressed with the work of the electoral system in Russia. We have a lot to learn from the Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation.”<sup>20</sup>*

*«Российская избирательная система одна из лучших, которые я видел, а я очень много путешествовал по разным странам. Нас очень впечатлила работа выборной системы в России. Нам есть чему поучиться у Центральной избирательной комиссии Российской Федерации.»<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>32</sup> Who are the Comelec commissioners in charge of the 2022 elections?, *PhilSTAR Life*, October 11 (2021), <https://philstarlife.com/news-and-views/850628-who-are-the-comelec-commissioners-in-charge-of-the-2022-elections?page=3>

<sup>33</sup> Socorro Inting is back as acting Comelec chairperson, *Rappler.com*, June 8 (2022), <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/elections/socorro-inting-again-acting-comelec-chairperson-june-8-2022/>

<sup>34</sup> Annual report 2021, *The Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone*, <https://ec.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ECSL-2021-ANNUAL-REPORT.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Xposing Tribalism and regionalism at SLPP ECSL using data and evidences, *APC Kuwait Branch* on Facebook, May 18 (2023), <https://www.facebook.com/apcbranchkuwait/posts/pfbid02ut9jNsfquC1tHPAQMTybzjDMgMmgDWhcTorYBL674hscGxVHNGRt9bKEJMUmNEgl>

<sup>36</sup> Alex Saffa on X/Twitter, <https://x.com/patlabib>

*“I was very impressed with the voter registration procedure. Russia has an entire automated system that collects and stores information about registered voters. This system can be trusted. In Africa, you have to declare yourself to get on the voter list. It is not as convenient as in your country.”*

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*“We were impressed that the Russian electoral system has a multi-level system of control and monitoring of compliance with the law and ensuring transparency of the electoral process.”<sup>20</sup>*

*“It is very impressive that voters in Russia have a choice of how to vote. If someone cannot come to the polling station, they can invite an election commission specialist to their home. This is convenient, especially for the elderly or those with disabilities.”<sup>20</sup>*

*“I was also impressed by the system of selecting members of election commissions from candidates, political parties, and public associations. In my country, the biggest problem is the problem of trust, because our commission members are appointed by the president. We should definitely borrow this Russian experience.”<sup>20</sup>*

*«Меня очень впечатлила процедура регистрации избирателей. В России целая автоматизированная система, которая собирает и хранит информацию о зарегистрированных избирателях. Этой системе можно доверять. В Африке ты должен сам себя заявить, чтобы попасть в список избирателей. Это не так удобно, как в вашей стране.»<sup>20</sup>*

*«Мы были впечатлены тем, что в российской избирательной системе многоуровневая система контроля и наблюдения за соблюдением закона и обеспечением прозрачности избирательного процесса.»<sup>20</sup>*

*«Очень впечатляет тот факт, что у избирателей в России есть выбор, как голосовать. Если кто-то не может прийти на избирательный участок, то он может пригласить специалиста избирательной комиссии на дом. Это удобно, особенно для людей в преклонном возрасте или с ограниченными физическими возможностями.»<sup>20</sup>*

*«Также меня впечатлила система отбора членов избирательных комиссий от кандидатов, политических партий, общественных объединений. В моей стране самая большая проблема — это проблема доверия, потому что у нас членов комиссии назначает президент. Вот этот российский опыт нам точно стоит позаимствовать»<sup>20</sup>*

“Alex Saffa, executive assistant to the chairperson of the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone, called the Russian electoral system one of the best he has seen in his practice. He noted the automated system for collecting and storing information about voters – according to Saffa, such a system can be trusted. He also noted the multi-level system of control over compliance with the law and transparency of the electoral processes and the system for selecting members of the electoral commissions. “It is very impressive that voters in Russia have a choice of how to vote. If someone cannot come to the polling station, they can invite an election commission specialist to their home. This is convenient, especially for elderly people or those with disabilities,” added Alex Saffa.”<sup>17</sup>

«Алекс Саффа, исполнительный помощник председателя Национальной избирательной комиссии Сьерра-Леоне, назвал российскую избирательную систему одной из лучших, которые ему довелось увидеть за время своей практики. Он отметил автоматизированную систему сбора и хранения информации об избирателях — по словам Саффа, такой системе можно доверять. Также он отметил многоуровневую систему контроля за соблюдением законности и прозрачности избирательных процессов и систему отбора членов избирательных комиссий. «Очень впечатляет тот факт, что у избирателей в России есть выбор, как голосовать. Если кто-то не может прийти на избирательный участок, то он может пригласить специалиста избирательной комиссии на дом. Это удобно, особенно для людей в преклонном возрасте или с ограниченными физическими возможностями», — добавил Алекс Саффа.»<sup>17</sup>

## • Justice Mihlanga

Name	Country	Observing mission	Affiliation
Justice Mihlanga	South Africa	Counterpart electoral bodies invited by Russia’s CEC	IEC Electoral Commission of South Africa <sup>19</sup>

Justice Mihlanga was seen only in St. Petersburg<sup>14,14,19</sup> on October 7, 2024. A Russian outlet presents him<sup>19</sup> as an employee of the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). Indeed, he is mentioned in several tender specifications<sup>37,38,39</sup> of the IEC for supplies, such as printing ballot papers, as the person responsible for the electoral commission provincial warehouse in Gauteng. According to his LinkedIn profile<sup>40</sup>, Justice Mihlanga has been a self-employed lawyer since October 2019 but worked for the IEC between November 2013 and December 2018 as “Electoral Project Coordinator.” However, people often forget to update their profiles. Justice Mihlanga does not appear on the website<sup>41</sup> of the IEC. Pictures and a video featuring Justice Mihlanga

<sup>37</sup> Tender specification for the production of training DVD, *Electoral Commission of South Africa*, November 12 (2015) (tender closing date), <https://studylib.net/doc/18330406/tender-specifications>

<sup>38</sup> Tender specification for the printing of ballot papers, *Electoral Commission of South Africa*, November 15 (2023) (tender closing date), <https://www.etenders.gov.za/home/Download/?blobName=e8c2f125-eee1-4aab-be54-11e28b9eabc2.pdf&downloadedFileName=Tender%20Document%20-%20Ballot%20Paper%20Printing.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Tender specification for fisherman multi-pocket vest, *Electoral Commission of South Africa*, June 11 (2024) (tender closing date), [https://votaquotes.elections.org.za/eproc\\_inter/Auctions/Attachments.aspx?FileID=15065&IAuctionID=38705](https://votaquotes.elections.org.za/eproc_inter/Auctions/Attachments.aspx?FileID=15065&IAuctionID=38705)

<sup>40</sup> Justice Mihlanga on LinkedIn, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/justice-mihlanga-78a464169/>

<sup>41</sup> IEC Organogram, *Electoral Commission of South Africa*, <https://www.elections.org.za/pw/About-Us/Organogram>

are available in the sources linked in footnotes<sup>14,14,19, 40</sup>. The Russian media outlet Saint Peterburg quoted Justice Mihlanga:

*“Each polling station/plays a key role in the success of elections. Especially (I assume in this election) the engagement of youth is a positive example which other states should consider to look more into. We saw that many resources are available for voter education/information. All information is available and transparent such as access to protocols.”<sup>19</sup>*

*«Каждый участок играет свою роль в успехе выборного процесса. Не могу не заметить роль молодых людей, которых также активно вовлекают в выборный процесс. Это своего рода инновация, которую можно порекомендовать и другим странам. Мы увидели, что очень много ресурсов используется, материалы, которые помогают людям определиться. Вся информация доступна, как идёт работа, информация о протоколах.»<sup>19</sup>*

- **Ramlan Harun**

Name	Country	Observing mission	Affiliation
Ramlan Harun	Malaysia	Counterpart electoral bodies invited by Russia’s CEC	SPR Election Commission of Malaysia <sup>42</sup>

Ramlan Harun was seen in Moscow<sup>10</sup> on October 6, 2024 and in St. Petersburg<sup>14,13,14,19</sup> on October 7. None of the Russian sources we have found mentions his name, but the physical resemblance is apparent. Ramlan Harun was appointed<sup>42</sup> chair of the Election Commission of Malaysia (SPR – Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya) on June 26, 2024. Pictures and videos featuring Ramlan Harun are available in the sources linked in footnotes<sup>12, 14,13,14,19,42,43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Ramlan Harun is new Election Commission chief, Selangor Journal, June 26 (2024), <https://selangorjournal.my/2024/06/ramlan-harun-is-new-election-commission-chief/>

<sup>43</sup> Nenggiri polls: Turnout among elderly, young voters encouraging as of 11 am, *The Sun*, August 17 (2024), <https://thesun.my/local-news/nenggiri-polls-turnout-among-elderly-young-voters-encouraging-as-of-11-am-ec-chairperson-JM12872748>

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERNATIONAL ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

EPDE proposes several calls to action to discourage the continued participation of fake observers, to protect the integrity of the institutions they represent in the Russian public, and to hold individuals accountable for undermining democratic processes:

1. EPDE calls on election management bodies to introduce / update transparency regulations and codes of conduct to prevent their staff members and experts from intentional or unintentional involvement in politically biased fake observation missions.
2. The institutions could assess career and financial disincentives for individuals intentionally participating in these activities, such as banning participation in international travel and missions or in international academic exchange.
3. To reinforce these measures, EPDE encourages peer election management bodies to apply institutional pressure and public censure against commissions found enabling or tolerating participation in fake observation missions, creating accountability within the professional network of CECs.
4. EPDE encourages media outlets globally to raise awareness and educate citizens about the dangers of fake election observation and the role certain individuals or organizations play in legitimizing fraudulent elections abroad to reduce their credibility and discourage others from participating.
5. EPDE urges election monitoring bodies and election commissions to adopt stricter transparency measures when holding elections and accrediting domestic and international observers. These should include publishing a complete, detailed list of all observers and their affiliations to simplify the identification and discreditation of biased election observers.