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Ukraine's state language law enshrines the lingua franca

By Vladimir Socor

Jamestown (16.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2HuCzun> - On May 15, Ukraine's outgoing president, Petro Poroshenko, promulgated the "Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language." The accompanying communique characterizes this law as "one of the fundamental acts in the formation of Ukrainian statehood" (Ukrayinska Pravda, May 15).

The long-debated language law is a centerpiece of Ukraine's post-Maidan transformation, alongside such nation-building gains as the development of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the establishment of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (see EDM, September 13, 2018; March 11, 2019). These processes consummate Ukraine's break with the Russian metropolis. In this perspective, the language law strengthens the efforts to reverse the centuries-long russification of Ukraine. After 1991, Ukrainian state weakness and the persisting ascendancy of the Russian language on the psycho-social level prevented the Ukrainian language from assuming the normal functions of a lingua franca in Ukraine's public sphere. Moreover, Ukraine remained fully exposed to the impact of Russia's far more powerful mass media and mass-culture products until 2014. The regime change and Russia's war at last inspired measures to protect and promote the Ukrainian language as a state-building foundation.

The Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament) adopted the language law on April 25, 2019, with 278 votes in favor, 38 opposed, and the remainder seemingly uncommitted in the 450-seat chamber. Motions by the pro-Russia opposition to block the law's promulgation were defeated by similar margins on May 14 (Ukrinform, April 25, May 14). The less-than-overwhelming majority is illustrative of the inertia that the de-russification process still encounters in some sections of Ukraine's society. At the same time, the constituency actively defending the legacy of russification has dwindled, as the balance of political forces has shifted. For comparison, the 2012 language law, which favored the Russian

language, was adopted with the votes of 248 deputies in the Verkhovna Rada at that time (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 6, 2012).

The just-promulgated law (Ukrinform, April 25; Golos Ukrayiny, May 16) obligates state officialdom to be capable of speaking the state language, and to use it in the performance of their official duties. The officials covered by this legislation range from the head of state, prime minister, ministers and heads of government departments, members of parliament, heads of state institutions and enterprises, and on down to civil servants, judges and notaries, police officers, professors and teachers in the public education system, postal workers, as well as medical personnel in state and municipal health care institutions.

Law enforcement, medical, and other personnel providing public services are, however, free to use languages other than Ukrainian when dealing with persons who cannot speak Ukrainian. State officials and civil servants in those categories are given a three-year transition period to learn the Ukrainian language with state assistance (see below).

These provisions are meant, in part, to remedy a uniquely Ukrainian linguistic imbalance. Russian remained the primary language of political elites (in interconnection with the business elites) in Ukraine long after 1991. Of all the presidents and prime ministers of this era (21 persons in toto), only one president (Viktor Yushchenko) and one prime minister (Arseniy Yatseniuk) are Ukrainophone in terms of native language and language of first choice. Several of Ukraine's leaders (e.g., Petro Poroshenko, Yulia Tymoshenko, Volodymyr Groysman) chose to switch from Russophone to Ukrainophone as their preferred language. Ukraine's industrial-financial "oligarchs" are all Russophone, as is the business sphere generally (this language law does not affect the private sphere).

This law introduces a state program to assist in learning the Ukrainian language, to be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. The state program shall sponsor courses to help achieve Ukrainian language fluency for adults who did not have such an opportunity until now.

Under this law, foreign citizens who apply for Ukrainian citizenship will have to pass a Ukrainian language test. Foreigners serving in Ukraine's armed forces and applying for citizenship shall have that test deferred by one year.

The law regulates the use of Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian language content in television and radio broadcasting, printed publications, IT systems, as well as advertising in these types of media. Ukrainian-produced print media in "other" languages (meaning, primarily, Russian) must offer a parallel, Ukrainian-language print run. (Many Ukrainian-language media outlets of all types offer parallel Russian-language versions). At least 50 percent of printed publications offered in each retail distribution site should be in Ukrainian. Breaches, such as exceeding the proportion of non-Ukrainian language content in audio-visual media, are punishable by fines. Insulting the Ukrainian language in public is deemed a criminal liability and may result in prison terms.

This law establishes a National Commission on State Language Standards and, in parallel, a Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language, both under the authority of the Cabinet of Ministers. The Commission is mandated to define requirements for language proficiency and conduct the testing. The Commissioner's office shall consider complaints and impose fines for breaches of this law, mainly in the sphere of consumer services.

While regulating the public use of the Ukrainian language, this law (or any other) does not apply to private communications, the business sphere, or the use of national minority languages. These and other languages shall be freely used in the cultural life of national minorities, religious rites, academic publications, as well as publications in English and

the other languages of the European Union, regardless of whether those publications include texts in Ukrainian or not.

Ukrainian society and members of parliament had debated the terms of such legislation literally from the next day after the EuroMaidan-precipitated regime change. The Verkhovna Rada adopted the first draft in October 2018. In total, no fewer than 2,000 amendments were considered until the law was finally adopted on April 25 (see above). In his message on this occasion, Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman commented that Ukraine honors its ethnic and linguistic pluralism, "but our state language can only be one—Ukrainian—which we must protect and develop. Esteem of the state language is self-esteem" (Liga.ua, April 25).

President-Elect Volodymyr Zelensky's message (via his campaign team) has straddled the issue, apparently seeking to hold together his heterogenous electorate. Inaccurately claiming that this law was adopted "hastily" and that it had been prompted by electoral considerations, Zelensky's message nevertheless fully endorsed the status of the Ukrainian language as the sole state language deserving of state support. But he objected to the penalties contained in this law, and promised to undertake a "thorough analysis" as soon as he takes office as president (Ukrinform, April 25). In his entertainer's career, Zelensky has a track record for satirizing (among many other things) Ukrainian national values, even in front of Russian audiences. As a presidential hopeful, in October 2018 he criticized the Ukrainian authorities' language policy for "dictating" to Ukrainians what to watch and "how to speak" (BBC Monitoring, November 13, 2018). As president, however, Zelensky will undoubtedly become respectful of Ukrainian national values.

Remember Odessa 2nd May 2014 Tragedy

See pictures of the 5th anniversary at <https://bit.ly/2PHoU6Y>

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (02.05.2019) - Five years ago, on 2nd May 2014, 48 people died in two violent confrontations between pro-Maidan and anti-Maidan activists marching in the centre of Odessa and several hours later in Kulikovo Square (a few kilometres away).

Two weeks later I was in Odessa and I started my investigation about the tragic events. All narratives at that time as well as later on were biased on both sides in Ukraine. Putin and his friends in Ukraine instrumentalized the tragedy with their distorted narratives and their fake news to serve the political agenda of the Kremlin. This propaganda presenting Ukraine as a state ruled by fascists is still alive today and was even perpetuated until last year through side-events at the European Parliament in Brussels.

Several investigation commissions in Ukraine, most of them lacking neutrality, published questionable reports and nobody was finally sentenced to a prison term. The main leaders of the deadly clashes in the centre of the city managed to flee to a "safe and friendly country". Others in Kulikovo Square where most anti-Maidan activists died in the fire of the trade union building, were not prosecuted. The Council of Europe published the only official report that was reliable. Its findings corresponded to ours.

Today UNIAN, a Ukrainian press agency, published an article about a 13-page UN briefing note entitled "Accountability for Killings and Violent Deaths on 2 May 2014 in Odesa" and drafted by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) (<https://bit.ly/2GLytO4>).

Conclusions and Recommendations of the UN Mission

50. Five years after the events of 2 May 2014 in Odesa, HRMMU notes that no one has been held responsible for the acts that led to the killings and violent deaths of 48 people and injuries to an estimated 247 people. HRMMU is concerned that the challenges described pose a serious impediment to the provision of access to justice for victims and their families. Accountability for crimes and access to justice for all is essential to establish public trust in the judiciary and the rule of law, and may serve as a bedrock for reconciliation and social cohesion.

51. Recommendations to the Government of Ukraine:

Office of the Prosecutor General

a. Ensure effective, prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into the acts of killing and violent deaths perpetrated during the 2 May 2014 violence in Odesa and consider the possibility of transferring the lead investigative role from the Odesa Regional Police Department to the Main Investigation Unit of the National Police.

National Police

b. Investigate effectively, promptly, thoroughly and impartially all acts of killing and violent deaths perpetrated during the 2 May 2014 violence in Odesa;

c. Consider deploying senior investigators with relevant experience to the investigative team in charge of investigations;

d. Ensure public order and provide security to all parties involved in the trials related to the 2 May 2014 violence in Odesa so that the cases of killings and violent deaths perpetrated in this context can be considered promptly, independently and impartially.

Presidents of courts of first instance

e. Grant priority status to the trials in the cases of killings and violent deaths perpetrated in the context of the 2 May 2014 violence in Odesa to ensure consideration of the cases without undue delay.

High Council of Justice, High Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine, President of Ukraine

f. Ensure qualification re-assessment of existing judges and recruitment of new judges without undue delay.

52. Recommendations to the international community, including to the Russian Federation:

a. Ensure that extradition requests for all absconded suspects in criminal cases related to the 2 May violence in Odesa are processed in a timely manner;

b. Consider providing international legal assistance in investigations conducted by Ukrainian authorities against individuals in relation to 2 May 2014 violence, if the requests of their extradition cannot be processed.

See HRWF report

at <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Odessa-2nd-May-2014-Tragedy.pdf>

Act I

6 people killed by firearms in the centre of the city (allegedly 4 pro-Maidan and 2 anti-Maidan)

Anti-Maidan activists came armed to the city centre

Gunshots fired by pro-Russian aggressors; first person killed

Street fighting left six dead, more than 100 wounded

The role of the medical services

The role of the police

Act II

About 40 people died in Kulikovo Square

Anti-Maidan crowd flees to Trade Union building

Firefighters slow to respond

Bloodiest day in Odessa since 1918

Act III

Anti-Maidan activists attack a police station and release prisoners

ANNEX

List of the victims by name and their death conditions

HRWF is on the side of all the families who lost one of their members in this tragedy which could have been avoided.

UNIAN articles:

<https://bit.ly/2VMFA2E>

<https://bit.ly/2VFNeVu>

<https://bit.ly/2JaRc8D>

Language law: In anticipation of shake-up in print media market

The law on the state language, among other things, directly affects media operations. The new legislation's norms on the Ukrainian language in print media deserve special attention. UNIAN contacted the editors of several Russian-language publications in Ukraine to find out their opinion on and readiness for innovations.

By Iryna Shevchenko

Unian Information Agency (27.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2ILYYXf> - On April 25, the Verkhovna Rada finally adopted an important law on the state language, which, among other things, regulates the print media market. The law says all print media in Ukraine shall be published in the state language, which is Ukrainian. In each print media distribution spot, the share of Ukrainian-language newspapers and magazines must be no

lower than 50%. A newspaper or magazine can be published in two or more language versions, one of which must be in the state language.

Head of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, Serhiy Tomilenko, emphasizes that, of course, journalists favor measures aimed at supporting the Ukrainian language. At the same time, in his opinion, the norms of the new law concerning the print media require further extensive discussions in publishing circles.

UNIAN contacted editors of several Russian-language publications of various levels from different regions across the country to find out their opinion on the law and their readiness for innovations.

For example, the editorial staff of Focus magazine are still studying the details of the document, because there were a lot of amendments to it. However, Chief Editor Yevhen Hordeychyk believes that, in general, the transition period provides an opportunity to prepare for the shift to the Ukrainian version of the publication as its main one. "However, the release of the bilingual version will require a significant increase in the cost of editing and printing services. Now we are calculating all this," he says.

According to the editor, he personally supports strengthening the role of the Ukrainian language in Ukraine. But to this end, it is necessary to stimulate the media to use it instead of applying prohibitive methods: "I think if the press were offered some kind of stimulating conditions, at least a reduction in VAT for the Ukrainian-speaking product, of which Zelensky spoke, it would be a much more correct move than the 'obliging' step."

The editorial board of the Zaporizhia-based newspaper, Subota Plus, is calm about innovations. Editor-in-Chief Oleh Loktev noted that the publication, on principle, had been declared as bilingual. Therefore, the materials are already published both in Russian and in Ukrainian anyway. "But, of course, the transition to the Ukrainian could affect the circulation and purchasing power in a negative direction, because the region is mostly Russian-speaking," Loktev argues.

A similar opinion is shared by Chief Editor of Kherson's Novy Den newspaper, Anatoly Zhupyna. He notes that the publication has long been publishing two versions – in Ukrainian and in Russian. And even the transition to the Ukrainian language should not be a problem. "Indeed, in the south of Ukraine there is more Russian-speaking population, but I don't think there will be an outflow of the audience if we publish fully in Ukrainian. Still, the population understands both languages," he says.

At the same time, Chief Editor of Dnipro Vechirniy, Iryna Avramenko, draws much gloomier prospects for her publication. According to her, her publication is both a website and a newspaper.

The site is a developing project with a rather young audience, which, according to Avramenko, sooner or later, adapt to the Ukrainian version. Pretty much, just like journalists. It is worth noting that, according to the law, sites shall be loaded in Ukrainian by default, but they may have other versions. At the same time, the volume of the Ukrainian version shall not be lower than that in another language.

"That is, there is no global problem with the site even in such mostly Russian-speaking region as Dnipro. But it is much more complicated with the newspaper. Here, I see great difficulties," says Avramenko. According to her, the newspaper's audience is over 70 years of age. And every year the age of this audience only increases. Moreover, there's the same situation across Ukraine, not only in Dnipropetrovsk region. "And this audience is not ready to rebuild. It doesn't feel comfortable. This does not mean that they are not patriots or anything. They help the Army, bring posters and postcards to the editorial

office, and send money to the front line. But it is difficult for them to adapt due to the fact that they are no longer young," the editor-in-chief explains.

In the conversation with UNIAN, Iryna told how three years ago she decided to make a "gift" to her readers. On Day of Ukrainian language, November 9, the volume was entirely in Ukrainian.

After that, the newspaper saw a 20% drop in circulation. "You know, if there was such an outflow even after a single issue, then the newspaper will be buried once we switch to Ukrainian completely," she complains.

Head of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, Serhiy Tomilenko, emphasizes: if the state limits itself to the requirements for publishers and does not stimulate citizens' demand for the Ukrainian-language press, we will only get a general reduction in circulation and bankruptcy of editorial boards.

"After all, the reader votes with their hryvnias, while the publishing process is an independent market business. Insufficient demand for the publication, the unwillingness of the market to pay for the production of copies in two languages, will lead to the extinction of print media as such rather than to what the authors of the law hope for," he explains. "I also note that the proposals of the core committee on freedom of speech are completely ignored. And it was through this committee that the publishers suggested introducing a model for phased quoting of volumes of Russian-language content in print media."

It should be reminded that in the fall of last year, Rada freedom of speech and information policy committee chief Viktoriya Siumar noted that the introduction of quotas for print media should be gradual so that "the industry has the opportunity to survive, and journalists, layout designers and editors do not lose their jobs." "As an option, two or three years can be given, during which the publication will be made switch to the Ukrainian language, or a phased introduction will be offered (25% of Ukrainian content in the first year, 35% in the second year, and then 50%," the deputy suggested.

In turn, member of the board of the International Union "Institute for National Policy," Maryna Bahrova, believes that the implementation of these laws in the media is unlikely to affect the economy of publications.

"Now the print media have actually been pushed out by the Internet. As a result, print media, even without the law on the state language, already struggle to survive," she says, adding that it is only a matter of time.

The issue of introducing certain norms of the new law for print media should not be reduced only to the issue of greater workload of editors who will have to spend more time translating texts from Russian into Ukrainian. The problem is actually wider. Today the question is once again being voiced on whether the print media (in particular, the regional ones) are able to remain afloat, or will they be forced into oblivion.

Ukraine has a Jewish President and a Jewish Prime Minister. What about anti-Semitism?

HRWF (23.04.2019) – Ukraine now has a Jewish President and a Jewish Prime Minister.

The new democratically elected president, comedian Volodymyr Zelensky, received around 73 percent of the votes in this weekend's election and the current Prime Minister, Volodymyr Groysman, is a Jewish politician who was the mayor of the city of Vinnytsia.

After Zelensky is sworn in as president, Groyzman will remain Prime Minister — at least for a while and possibly until the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in fall.

Some say it proves that Ukrainians are not anti-Semitic while others stress that Ukraine had more anti-Semitic incidents than all former Soviet countries combined in the last few years.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency shed some light on the complex phenomenon of anti-Semitism in Ukraine that President Putin largely exploited in his anti-Ukrainian propaganda during Poroshenko's presidency.

Anti-Semitism in Ukraine

Jewish Telegraphic Agency (22.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2IObuof> -

After all, Russia and other critics claim Ukrainian society has a serious anti-Semitism problem and legacy.

"Imagine, a pure-blooded Jew with the appearance of a Sholom Aleichem protagonist wins by a landslide in a country where the glorification of Nazi criminals is enacted into law," Avigdor Eskin, a Russian-Israeli columnist, wrote in an analysis published earlier this month by the Regnum news agency.

But Eskin's statement about Ukrainian laws glorifying Nazi criminals is not inaccurate, and Russia is not alone in criticizing Ukraine over this and other issues connected to anti-Semitism.

Last year, Israel's government in its annual report on anti-Semitism singled out Ukraine as a regional trouble spot.

"A striking exception in the trend of decrease in anti-Semitic incidents in Eastern Europe was Ukraine, where the number of recorded anti-Semitic attacks was doubled from last year and surpassed the tally for all the incidents reported throughout the entire region combined," the report said. The authors of the report said they counted more than 130 reported anti-Semitic incidents in Ukraine in 2017.

Also last year, more than 50 U.S. Congress members condemned Ukrainian legislation that they said "glorifies Nazi collaborators" and therefore goes even further than Poland's controversial laws limiting what can be said about local complicity during the Holocaust.

"It's particularly troubling that much of the Nazi glorification in Ukraine is government-supported," a letter signed by the U.S. lawmakers said.

The letter noted ceremonies, gestures and legislation venerating leaders of the UPA and OUN militias, who fought alongside Nazi Germany during World War II and whose troops participated in atrocities against Jews and other victims.

Poroshenko's government greatly encouraged glorification of those troops and leaders as fighters for Ukrainian freedom who it insisted sided with Germany only in order to fight against the Russian-controlled Soviet Union.

Several cities across Ukraine named streets for the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, who prior to Poroshenko's time in office was openly glorified only in the country's west.

Meanwhile, in the western city of Lviv, nationalists became emboldened enough to celebrate — with the permission of city authorities — the anniversary of the 14th Galician division of the Waffen SS. The anniversary events featured men parading in Nazi SS uniforms on the street.

Such sights would have been unthinkable under Viktor Yanukovich, the corrupt president who was deposed in a 2013 revolution that ended with Poroshenko's election. Careful to alienate neither ethnic Russians in Ukraine nor its powerful neighbor to the east, Yanukovich was less tolerant of this nationalist phenomenon.

On this subject, Zelensky has said only that he personally does not favor the veneration of people like Bandera, whom he described as "a hero to some Ukrainians." It was a markedly reserved formulation compared to the endorsement of figures like Bandera by officials under Poroshenko.

The presidential campaign itself has featured some anti-Semitism.

In some far-right circles, Zelensky's work for a television station owned by the Jewish billionaire Igor Kolomoisky was proof of his belonging to a "Jewish cabal." But it made Zelensky popular with other nationalists who appreciated Kolomoisky's reputation as a fiery patriot.

Alexander Paliy, an influential political analyst supporting Poroshenko, stirred controversy last month when he wrote on Facebook that, despite his "respect" for Jews and some Russians, "The president of Ukraine should be Ukrainian and Christian, like the absolute majority of Ukrainians."

Such rhetoric is shocking to many of Ukraine's some 300,000 Jews, whose ancestors suffered murderous anti-Semitism in Ukraine for centuries before, during and decades after the Holocaust.

The French-Jewish philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy also referenced Ukrainian Jews' bloody history in an interview with Zelensky, the 41-year-old son of scientists who lived near major Soviet army bases in Ukraine.

"His Judaism. It's extraordinary that the possible future president of the country of the Shoah by Bullets and Babi Yar is a self-affirmed Jew from a family of survivors from Kryvy Rih near Dnipro — the land of pogrom if ever there was one," Levy wrote in an article published earlier this month in Le Point. "This postmodern kid, is the new proof that the virus of anti-Semitism has been contained" after the revolution, Levy added.

Not denying his Jewish ancestry, Zelensky declined to explore it at length in the interview, Levy wrote. On this subject, he replied with typical self-deprecating humor, telling Levy, "The fact that I am Jewish barely makes 20 in my long list of faults."

Zelensky has ingratiated himself with the Ukrainian public with such jokes as the star of "Servant of the People" — a primetime television show where he portrays a teacher thrust by an unlikely chain of events to become Ukraine's president. He announced his candidacy in January, becoming an instant favorite.

This popularity has allowed Zelensky to win on an unusually vague platform and distinguish himself from his professional politician rivals, with their proclivity to hyperbole and nationalist slogans.

Opinions about the first round of the presidential election

HRWF (02.04.2019) – The first round of the presidential election is over. Zelensky (about 30%) and Poroshenko (about 16%) will compete in a second round on 21 April. Ukrainian NGOs, Ukraine's Interior Ministry and international institutions reacted about the process.

CVU: Fair elections with no systemic violations that could affect the election results

CVU's Oleksii Koshel stated that in general, the election was fair and that there were no systemic violations that could affect the election results. "The election campaign was affected by the large use of negative campaigning but the conduct of the Election Day was of a high quality", said Koshel.

"In this election, the violation of the secrecy of the vote occurred on a mass scale", noted CVU analyst Denis Rybachok. Among the major violations CVU indicates inaccurate voter lists and wide-spread mistakes by precinct election commissions in registering voters, illegal campaigning during the day of silence and E-Day.

Observers also recorded a low level of performance on different levels of election commissions, with some cases of commissions counting votes before the vote was officially over and several cases of ballots being given to voters without checking for proper identification.

Voter turnout was quite low in Transcarpathia, Chernivtsi and Kherson oblasts, which is believed to be due to the high number of labor migrants from these regions living abroad and the very small-scale political campaign run in these regions. Observers also recorded some cases of protest voting and ballot spoiling in Chernivtsi and Transcarpathia regions.

"For Ukrainians abroad, there were long queues to vote, regulatory barriers and other obstacles that inhibited their ability to vote, such as the financial cost to travel to polling stations repeatedly", said Koshel. "There is a need to reform the voting system for Ukrainians living abroad, such as by increasing the number of polling stations or by allowing a postal vote."

Unconfirmed bomb threats against polling stations and candidate headquarters in certain regions were not that wide-spread, however observers believe that this mechanism of disrupting the election may be used more actively in the second round of the election. In this election, polling stations worked continuously despite such cases of threats being made against polling stations.

The full statement can be found at <https://bit.ly/2CLCqBu>.

EPDE: "No politically biased election observation activities were identified" - Anton Shekhovtsov

During the first round of Presidential Elections, EPDE experts did not identify international politically biased election observation missions' activities. "Such missions, however, could be activated during the second round", stated Anton Shekhovtsov, EPDE analyst.

"The chief objective of politically biased international election observation is to mislead the local and international public regarding the legitimacy of election results", said

Stefanie Schiffer, Head of the Board of EPDE. "These observation missions spread mistrust towards democratic institutions".

Shekhovtsov recommended that the Ukrainian Central Election Commission should scrutinize the applications of international observers based on their potential former engagement within missions that aimed to discredit the institution of international election observation. He underlined the importance of sanctions against individuals who previously observed illegitimate elections in Crimea and in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk. "This explains, at least partially, the lack of the so-called international fake observation in this election".

"The fact that we did not have a visible activity of fake election observers is a sign of how resilience and a strict reaction from the side of the administration can protect the integrity of elections", said Schiffer. "Other countries may be able to learn from Ukraine's experience". "In the 2014 Presidential elections we identified several fake election observation missions", added Shekhovtsov. "These included missions lead by far-right activist Mateusz Piskorski from Poland and a mission lead by Hungary's Jobik Party, which included members of the German far-right party Alternative for Germany (AFD)".

Previously, EPDE members Civil Network Opora and Committee of Voters of Ukraine have reported a large number of Ukrainian politically motivated election observation groups. There were 139 domestic NGOs registered in Ukraine as election observation organizations, of which 85 have no previous experience of election observation, more than 30 NGOs had connections to a single presidential candidate, and only five observed the 2014 Presidential elections. "We can see a mushrooming of election observation here in Ukraine which has a clear political connotation and threatens to cast doubts on the credibility of election observation", said Schiffer.

OPORA: Elections took place in a competitive environment and in compliance with basic electoral standards

The most frequent violations recorded by OPORA observers on election day were the attempts by members of election commissions to give out ballots to voters without checking their documents (passport, temporary ID cards for Ukrainian citizens, or military IDs). Such violations took place at 14.5% of polling stations. Breach of the secrecy of voting by voters who photographed their ballots was the most frequently recorded violation on Election day. Such cases were identified by observers in 10.4% of polling stations.

However, these and other violations of electoral legislation did not present any constraints for citizens to exercise their right to vote and be elected.

The full statement can be found at <https://bit.ly/2FPWLYb> .

Interior Ministry: Police receive more than 2,000 reports of electoral violations on Sunday

Interfax Ukraine (01.04.2019) – <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/577429.html> - As of 10:00 p.m. on Sunday, the National Police of Ukraine received 2,199 appeals and reports of violations during the regular presidential election.

"As of 22:00, the police received 2,199 appeals and reports related to the electoral process. Most violations were recorded in Dnipropetrovsk region - 317, the city of Kyiv had 278 of violations, Donetsk region - 215, Odesa – 200 violations, Kharkiv - 197, and Poltava – 101. Thirty-nine criminal proceedings have been opened," Viktoria Navrotska,

the deputy director of the liaison department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine wrote on her Facebook page.

The ministry clarified that these facts are related to: illegal campaigning - 135; photographing ballots - 129; voters' bribery - 45; bulletin damage - 34; a false bomb threat - 18; an attempt to remove the bulletin from the polling station - 13. Thirty-nine criminal proceedings have been opened.

Prosecutor General's Office opened a criminal case about an 'anonymous' illegal financing of a political party: more than 70,000 EUR (Video)

Prosecutor General's Office <https://bit.ly/2TQEOGi> - According to the procedural guidance of the Kyiv prosecutor's office, investigators of the SSU SBU in Kiev have been notified of suspicion of a citizen of Ukraine who has paid contributions in support of one of the political parties for a total amount of more than UAH 2.2 million while remaining anonymous, that is, committed a crime.

The fact is that this person entered into a preliminary agreement with the head of the department of one of the Ukrainian banks, which, secured the illegal registration of payments and the selection of persons on behalf of which unlawful banking operations were carried out.

The suspect paid to the account of the political party, while illegally using personal data of 15 Ukrainian citizens and not indicating themselves as the owner of the funds and their payer, thus remaining anonymous person. The Prosecutor General's Office opened a criminal investigation.

EU: Preliminary data say first round of Ukraine election "decent"

UNIAN (01.04.2109 – 12h50) - <https://bit.ly/2UITkAB> - Head of the European Delegation to Ukraine, Ambassador Hugues Mingarelli, says no reports have been received so far of any significant violations of election law following the first round of Ukraine presidential election.

"We are waiting for the ODIHR assessment. I guess we will have the first assessment today. Up to now, we have not heard anything about serious violations of the law but again we are waiting for the ODIHR assessment," said Mingarelli. At the same time, he noted that observers from the EU member states were present at a large number of polling stations. "We have not been told that there were major violations. Therefore, our preliminary feeling, assessment, is that the elections were carried out in a decent way," stressed Mingarelli.

OSCE Mission: Elections in Ukraine were free, competitive

The first round of the presidential elections in Ukraine was competitive and citizens had the opportunity to freely express their will, the OSCE PA Election Observation Mission in Ukraine has said.

Such conclusions were made public by the OSCE Special Coordinator, Honorary President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Ilkka Kanerva during a joint press conference of representatives of the mission of international election observers in Ukraine consisting of representatives of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the European Parliament (EP) and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA).

"This presidential election was competitive. Voters had a broad choice and turned out in high numbers," OSCE Special Co-ordinator Ilkka Kanerva said. "Fundamental freedoms were generally respected. Candidates could campaign freely."

"Election Day was assessed positively overall and paves the way to the second round," he quoted a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions by the International Election Observation Mission on Ukraine's March 31 presidential election.

"My personal conclusion is that this competitive election has laid the groundwork for the vibrant second round. I hope that this will encourage Ukraine to continue on its path of democratic development at peace and security within its internationally recognized borders in our community of European values," he said.

Kanerva paid attention to the fact that there were many international observers at the election, which helped minimize violations.

He said the violations established during the day of voting, did not in general influence the result of the vote. He added that elections could not be organized in Crimea and areas of Ukraine not under Ukraine's control.

Police receive more than 2,000 reports of electoral violations on Sunday – Interior Ministry

Interfax – Ukraine (01.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2CMXN5s> - As of 10:00 p.m. on Sunday, the National Police of Ukraine received 2,199 appeals and reports of violations during the regular presidential election.

"As of 22:00, the police received 2,199 appeals and reports related to the electoral process. Most violations were recorded in Dnipropetrovsk region - 317, the city of Kyiv had 278 of violations, Donetsk region - 215, Odesa – 200 violations, Kharkiv - 197, and Poltava – 101. Thirty-nine criminal proceedings have been opened," Viktoriya Navrotska, the deputy director of the liaison department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine wrote on her Facebook page.

The ministry clarified that these facts are related to: illegal campaigning - 135; photographing ballots - 129; voters' bribery - 45; bulletin damage - 34; a false bomb threat - 18; an attempt to remove the bulletin from the polling station - 13. Thirty-nine criminal proceedings have been opened.

Situation on 1 April at 9.42 am.

Observation findings by CVU and OPORA of the Election Day

CVU/ OPORA (31.03.2019) - The Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU) and the Civil Network OPORA reported on various incidents recorded during the Election day.

CVU observation

"2100 observers have been deployed across the country by CVU today", said Oleksiy Koshel. Among the main issues identified by CVU during the vote were violations of

voting procedures by the members of the precinct election commissions, inaccuracy of the voter lists, illegal campaigning, and photographing of the filled-in ballots by voters.

"We have registered inaccuracies in the voter lists in two thirds of the polling stations observed", said Denys Rybachok. "We estimate hundreds or even thousands of voters who could not vote due to the fact that they were not registered in the voter lists".

CVU observers reported many cases where voters came to polling stations without proper ID, many cases of spoiled ballots due to inappropriate usage of stamps by election commissioners, and several cases of protocols being filled in before the voting has been accomplished. Photographing of ballots was reported during the entire voting process as well as illegal campaigning by some candidates. "The voting was calm and peaceful", said Koshel.

OPORA observation

OPORA's analyst, Oleksandr Kliuzhev, stated that according to their parallel vote tabulation there was a voter turnout of 49.8% (with a 0.6% margin of error) up until 16:00, with higher turnout in Eastern regions compared to Western regions. In general, observers reported that they were provided free access to polling stations and could freely observe the elections.

Kliuzhev identified the illegal issuance of ballots was wide-spread on E-day. Especially in rural areas OPORA observed that voters received their ballots without providing necessary identifying documents and that the ratio of these offences was quite high. "It is important to educate the electorate about the illegality of obtaining ballots without proper documentation", said Kliuzhev. "It is particularly important in advance of the next round of the elections."

OPORA also recorded that 17% of polling stations opened earlier than 08:00, which violates electoral procedures. "This and other violations indicate that members of election commissions require more training to be better informed about procedures before the second round of elections", said Kliuzhev. The frequent changes of election commission members have affected the performance of the election commissions.

Up until now the voting process was peaceful but no final statements can be made until the final count and tabulation of votes occurred and the overall Election Day procedures have been completed. No direct attempts of falsifying the vote were recorded by OPORA, such as through ballot box stuffing.

Zelensky leading in presidential polls, followed by Poroshenko, Hrytsenko, Tymoshenko – RAND poll

Interfax-Ukraine (25.03.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2HSh711> - If the presidential election had been held next Sunday, 17.3% of those polled would have voted for showman Volodymyr Zelensky, incumbent President Petro Poroshenko would have been supported by 13.9%, Civil Position Party leader Anatoliy Hrytsenko by 13.2% and Batkivschyna Party leader Yulia Tymoshenko by 13%.

Those are the results of a survey conducted by the Center for Social Engineering RAND presented at the Kyiv-based Interfax-Ukraine news agency on Monday. Some 8.5% of those polled said they would vote for Opposition Platform – For Life leader Yuriy Boiko, 3.6% for Opposition Bloc leader Oleksandr Vilkul, and 3.2% for Radical Party leader Oleh Liashko.

Among respondents who have made their choice and said they would definitely vote, Zelensky leads with 22.5% of votes, followed by Poroshenko with 18.1%, Hrytsenko with 17.1%, Tymoshenko with 16.9%, Boiko with 11%, Vilkul with 4.7%, and Liashko with 4.2%.

Some 8% of respondents said they still had not made up their minds, while 15.4% said they would not vote.

If Zelensky and Tymoshenko make it to the second round of elections, the former would win 30.6% to 16.5%. A Poroshenko versus Zelensky race would see the latter win 29.4% to 21.8%. Zelensky would also defeat Hrytsenko in the second round by a slight margin, 27.9% to 27.8%, according to survey results.

In a race between Hrytsenko and Poroshenko, the former would defeat the incumbent president 32.8% to 22.4%. Hrytsenko would also beat Tymoshenko, 32.4% to 21.1%.

Tymoshenko would defeat Poroshenko in the second round, 23.7% to 21.6%, according to the poll results.

The survey was conducted from March 16 to March 23. Some 1,800 respondents were polled in face-to-face interviews in all regions of Ukraine, except Russia-occupied Crimea and in Russia-occupied areas of Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The margin of error is not more than 2.5%.

Ukrainian official charged in acid attack on activist after outcry

Ukrainian prosecutors said Monday (11 February) they had charged a high-ranking regional official with organising a deadly acid attack on a prominent anti-corruption activist that prompted widespread outrage.

EURACTIV (11.02.2019) - <http://bit.do/eJqhT> - Kateryna Gandzyuk, who worked as an adviser to the mayor of the southern city of Kherson, was an outspoken critic of corruption in law enforcement agencies.

She was attacked in July and had about a litre of acid poured on her by several attackers. The 33-year-old died in November after months of treatment, including more than 10 operations.

Her murder has prompted widespread outrage, with civil society activists accusing the authorities of failing to complete the investigation or find out who ordered the attack.

On Monday, less than two months before Ukrainians go to the polls to elect a president, General Prosecutor Yuriy Lutsenko pointed the finger at the head of the local council in the southern region of Kherson.

Vladyslav Manger is accused of "organising the murder of Kateryna Gandzyuk," Lutsenko said on Facebook.

According to the charge sheet released by Lutsenko, Manger was guided by "personal animosity" towards Gandzyuk because she opposed illegal logging in the region.

Lutsenko's spokeswoman Larysa Sargan said Manger was accused of "intentionally and unlawfully causing the death of another person... with special cruelty and by prior agreement with a group of individuals".

Speaking to AFP, Sargan said that Manger was not yet arrested.

"Searches are under way in Kherson," she said.

Expelled from the party

If found guilty, the 48-year-old faces up to life in prison.

Manger was a member of the Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) political party of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, a key rival of President Petro Poroshenko in the 31 March presidential election.

He was expelled from the party last week.

Gandzyuk's death has sparked condemnation of the government and drew renewed attention to dozens of assaults on other anti-corruption campaigners in Ukraine over recent months.

In August, police detained five people in connection with the case, three of whom were placed under house arrest.

In November, a former aide to a ruling party lawmaker was arrested on suspicion of being involved in the attack.

Both the European Union and the United States have called the attacks on activists unacceptable and urged authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Fellow activists accused police and prosecutors of reluctance to investigate the case, insisting the detention of those possibly involved in the attack was made only after a wave of protests across the country.

Lutsenko in November submitted a letter of resignation to Poroshenko over the affair but the Ukrainian leader refused to fire him.

More than 50 attacks on anti-graft activists, environmental and human rights campaigners including five murders were recorded last year.

Number of Ukrainians who trust church falls 6% last year - opinion poll

Interfax Religion (30.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2UKIpwG> - Kiev, January 30, Interfax - Ukrainian citizens most of all trust people living nearby (68%), volunteers (63%), church (51%), and the Ukrainian Armed Forces (51%), according to the results of an opinion poll conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology.

According to the findings of the opinion poll, which has been carried out between November 30 and December 14, 2018, the lowest number of Ukrainians believes in the Ukrainian government (11%) and the Verkhovna Rada (8%).

"The pro-European opposition (Batkivshchyna, Samopomich and others) has a better balance of trust and distrust (24% trust them and 47% distrust them) than the opposition to the former authorities (the Opposition Bloc, the Opposition Platform - For Life), as 16% believe in them and 58% do not believe in them, but both balances are negative," according to sociologists.

Besides, the level of trust to Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko stands at 16%.

Meanwhile, according to the opinion poll, the level of confidence in the Ukrainian Armed Forces did not change much and now amounts to 51% against 2017. According to the findings of the opinion poll in regions, the Ukrainian Armed Forces are mostly trusted in the western region (62%), and they are the least trusted in the eastern region (28%).

The church is still among the leading factors of Ukrainians' trust over all the years of monitoring.

"However, the level of confidence dropped 6% (from 57% to 51%) last year. The highest number of those who believe in the church most of all was revealed in western regions (69%), while the lowest number [of such respondents] in central regions (42%)," the statement reads.

A total of 31% of Ukrainians trust domestic media, while 29% the Ukrainian National Police, and 21% the Ukrainian Security Service.

The opinion poll was conducted by a method of individual interviews among 2,034 respondents, who live in 110 Ukrainian populated localities. The statistical margin of error does not exceed 3.3% for figures close to 50%, and 2.8% for figures close to 25%, 2.0% for figures close to 10%, and 1.4% for figures approaching 5%.