

**EUROPEAN DIALOGUE &
DEMOCRACY ASSOCIATION (EDDA)
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**



**FINAL REPORT
POLAND
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 15 OCTOBER 2023**

INTRODUCTION

The Parliamentary elections in Poland were held on the 15th of October 2023. In the period leading up to the election and during election day observers from the organization European Dialogue and Democracy Association (EDDA) were present and conducted a short-term Election Observation Mission (EOM). The mission was headed by Elisa Parnefält Størksen, Sondre Røise and Maja E. Augestad Breistøl.

The EDDA EOM in Poland consisted of 17 short-term observers (STOs) who all underwent training through the OSCE/ODIHR Comprehensive E-Learning course. The STOs arrived in Warsaw on the 11th of October. In the days leading up to the parliamentary elections, observers attended an array of meetings with international and national organizations in order to get acquainted with the political context in which the elections were held. The 2023 elections in Poland are considered pivotal for the country's political future, and observers were able to learn about the significance of the election and changes in the electoral law leading up to it. It was clear that these elections were particularly notable after meeting with local and international academics and officials in Warsaw.

Essential takeaways from these meetings included changes of election day traditions by introducing a referendum on election day, unequal media coverage of the incumbents and opposition, and updates on recent changes in the electoral law.

CHALLENGES REGARDING ACCREDITATION

When the STOs landed in Warsaw, the EOM coordinators had not yet received confirmation on our request for official election observation accreditation for election day. We were informed by the National Election Commission that they were still awaiting a response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland with regards to whom would receive official accreditation. The lack of clear communication from the authorities regarding this issue led to a cooperation between EDDA, local and international organizations in releasing a joint and urgent call for immediate accreditation for international observers on the 13th of October¹. Furthermore, a press-conference was organized outside of the Electoral Commission to further promote the cause on the 14th of October at 14:00. A few minutes before the press conference was set to begin, we received a joint email from the Election Commission that they would prepare our accreditation. A few hours later, we received a new email stating that the accreditation would be ready around 20:30 on the 14th of October, only 10 hours before the election observation was set to begin.

ELECTION DAY

On election day, the STOs were divided into seven observer teams where each group was accompanied by a local interpreter. Observations consisted of 71 visits to a total of 55 polling stations (PSs). Observations were conducted in different areas of central Warsaw. We also have some observations recorded in the district of Lowicz, situated an hour outside the Polish capital. EDDA STOs visited a diverse set of polling stations, including those located in prisons, hospitals and psychiatric institutions.

OPENING PROCEDURES

Opening of PSs on election day was carried out satisfactorily in most of the observed cases. One group of observers described opening procedures as 'very good', five groups rated 'good', and one group marked the opening procedures as 'bad'. However, issues did arise when two observer-groups were first denied entrance upon arrival, resulting in the impediment of observation of opening procedures. All of the groups noted a lack of control sheets in the ballot boxes, whilst a majority of groups also noted shortcomings concerning

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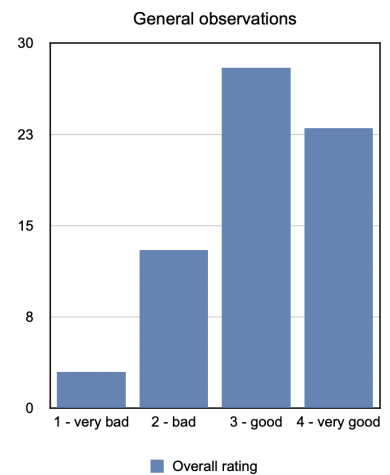
<https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/statement-urgent-call-for-immediate-accreditation-of-international-observers-for-the-polish-parliamentary-elections.html>

announcing the number of voters as well as noting the number of voters and serial numbers of the ballot box seals into the protocol.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Overall, the voting process was assessed positively by the STOs, demonstrated through a majority of good overall ratings. The overall conduct of PSOs was deemed to be 'very good', and good gender balance was observed. The chairpersons of the PSs were 50,7 percent female and 49,3 percent male. Also, there were no observations of excess delays in administering the vote, despite the record voter-turnout in Warsaw.

However, there were problems regarding disorganization and crowding in several PSs. STOs shared details of long queues inside the PSs, which were generally characterized by a lack of system. Observers also noted general confusion and differing practices regarding the handling of the referendum ballots. Here, some officials inquired voters about their preferences, whilst others only provided these ballots upon request. Though PSOs were observed to be behaving in a satisfactory manner, several PSOs expressed their experience with a lack of training leading up to election day. Observers also reported that ballots used in the PSs were pre-stamped in piles before being handed to voters.



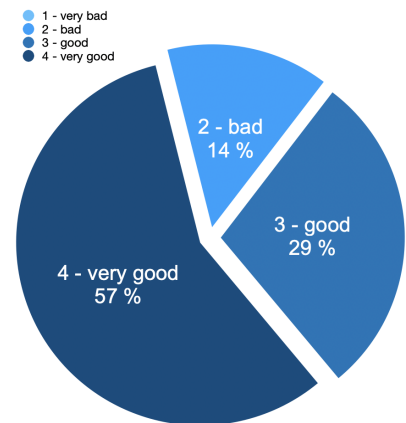
SECURITY OF THE VOTE

Concerns regarding the secrecy of the vote were a recurring factor in the general observation reports filed by EDDA observers. Although more than 55 percent of the reports noted that observed ballots cast were marked in secrecy, 48 percent stated that they were not. More than 56 percent of the PSs visited were described by observers as containing inappropriate booths, screens or lighting that failed to ensure the secrecy of the vote. Here, many reports detail how one could impair the secrecy of the vote by simply glancing over the voting screens or the voters' shoulders. In addition, several observers reported voters using benches, walls, tables without voting booths and the floor to mark their ballots instead of using the designated voting stations.

The secrecy of the vote was also challenged by a high degree of group and/or family voting. Such instances were observed at approximately 75 percent of the polling stations visited. PSOs intervened to limit this in some cases, however it was mostly allowed to transpire.

CLOSING PROCEDURES

Observation of the closing procedures was partially hindered by the timeline of the counting process. The observers spent an average of five hours and six minutes observing the closing procedures. However, none of our STOs were able to observe the closing proceedings until completion due to long working hours and the extensive duration of the counting process. The observers noted an insufficient number of PSOs in all PSs during the closing procedures. Two observer groups also faced difficulties from PSOs related to their right to observe the closing procedures.



Despite this, overall ratings for the observed closing procedures were judged positively. PSOs in five out of seven PSs were deemed to have performed in a satisfactory manner, despite what appeared to be some confusion regarding how to perform the official closing procedures.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Based on 71 visits to 55 polling stations in central Warsaw and the district of Lowicz during the 2023 Polish Parliamentary elections and referendum, EDDAs overall assessment is that the procedures on election day were followed in a transparent, free and fair manner. Our election observers were generally met with positive attitudes by PSOs, and the overall ratings were good. However, STOs also reported irregularities such as crowding, failure to ensure the secrecy of the vote, group/family voting and differing practices.

It is our conclusion based on our limited number of observations that the observed issues that appeared during voting were a result of training- or procedure-related confusion and thus do not appear to indicate intentional election fraud. However, the STOs observed more occurrences than simple mishaps, where the secrecy of the vote was not upheld during voting. Thus we conclude, based on our observations in the PSs we visited, that many voters did not cast their vote in secret.