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EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

ELECTION OBSERVATION FORMS

ELECTION EVALUATION GUIDE¹

by

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on the basis of observations by

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¹*These questionnaires are drafted for the purpose of traditional election observation, which means for elections where no voting machines are used.*

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Introduction

- 1. In response to the request for simplification of the questionnaires contained in the Venice Commission's election evaluation guide (CDL-AD(2003)010), a simplified version is appended, taking users' comments into account.*
- 2. This paper also explains some of the changes made in respect of the previous questionnaires.*

General

3. The variety of questionnaires reflects the differences in the aims of the organisations which observe elections. For example, election observation by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is part of a very detailed election monitoring procedure (with observers in place several weeks before polling day). It therefore differs from election observation by the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE). The use of a single questionnaire therefore raises the question of the nature of the mission assigned to (or taken on by) the Organisation. The use of a similar questionnaire by the different organs of the Council of Europe does seem plausible, however, as the general spirit and methods of observation are very similar.
4. These questionnaires are designed to permit electronic processing of the replies. This means limiting the use of open questions and focusing on the problems most frequently encountered.
5. The questionnaires may be specially adapted to suit a specific election or the electoral laws of a particular country. Here again, we have focused on the situations most frequently encountered in the countries habitually observed by the Council of Europe. They are also designed for both local and national elections. The second questionnaire (appendix II), for example, has a section on the political formations or candidates in the lists, to be filled in before the poll and before the questionnaires are given out to the observation teams, making it possible for observers subsequently to indicate which political formations polling station attendants and observers belong to and how many of these there are for each political formation or candidate. The secretariats responsible for the organisation of a given election observation mission are invited to adapt these observation questionnaires before they are distributed to observers.

Questionnaires

6. Three questionnaires are submitted to the observers: opening of the polls, polling day and closing of the polls. Experience shows that this is not a problem. However, the secretariat of the observer delegation must take care to produce enough copies of these documents, especially the questionnaire concerning the conduct of the poll (appendix II), as the teams of observers visit several polling stations between the opening and closing of the poll.
7. The layout and legibility of the documents are important for the comfort of observers, in view of the often difficult conditions in which they work. The polling station questionnaire (conduct of the poll) has thus been reduced to **one sheet**, to make it easier to use:
 - one side contains closed questions;
 - on the other, observers can note down any additional comments.
8. Observers in polling stations thus no longer need to turn the questionnaire over. This makes it easier to use. They are invited to fill in the back of the form after leaving the polling station, with the exception, perhaps, of the part of the second questionnaire (appendix II) concerning the political affiliations of members and observers.
9. The questions asked generally coincide with those in other organisations' questionnaires.
10. To avoid going into too much detail, while at the same time catering for a wide variety of situations and laws, reference is often made to "conformity with the law or the electoral code", which naturally presupposes a minimum of familiarity on the part of observers with the legislation in force in the country whose elections they are observing. When preparing election observation missions, therefore, secretariats are advised to send observers copies of the corresponding electoral laws in advance.
11. Observers are also invited to make a simple overall assessment (*very good, quite good, rather poor, and very poor*). This is information the Head of delegation and the secretariat in charge of the observation mission can make use of easily and swiftly. We have intentionally removed the 'average' option, which observers tended to tick too frequently, thereby avoiding the need to take a clear stance.
12. On the back of the questionnaire on observation of the vote counting, there is a space for noting the results, but this is optional. It is up to each delegation to decide whether or not this section should be filled in. It does not unduly complicate the task.
13. For secretariats preparing future election observation missions, it is important to stress the need to respect the layout of the different questionnaires, each of which fits onto one page, with all the compulsory items on the front and space for notes or optional additional comments on the back.

Questionnaire on visit to polling station before opening

Names of observers: _____ Team number: I _____ I
 Polling Station: **Municipality:** _____ **Station District Name:** _____ Station Number: I _____ I
 Time of arrival at station: _____ Time of leaving station: _____
Number of persons registered on electoral list: I _____ I **on any additional list:** I _____ I *(moved from heading of annex II)*

- Was the electoral commission of the polling station at full strength when you arrived? YES NO
 Is the composition of this commission in compliance with the electoral Code/Law? YES NO
 Are party representatives/candidates and observers present in the polling station? YES NO
 Are unauthorised persons present in the polling station? YES NO
 If so, who?

- Voting material** (ballot papers, electoral lists, etc.) Have these arrived? YES NO
 Were the quantities sufficient and in compliance with legal requirements? YES NO

Conduct of formal operations

- Checking of ballot box: did the chairman's office get members of the electoral commission and observers to check that it was empty before it was sealed? YES NO
 Is the ballot box properly sealed or closed? YES NO
Did they deposit a list with commission members' signatures? YES NO

Electoral list roll

- Does the electoral list pose a problem of conformity with the law? YES NO
 Indicate any problems noted:
 Are the members of the electoral commission familiar with their tasks? YES NO
 Are the other operations required by the electoral law being performed correctly? YES NO
 Comments (if any)

Opening

- Did voting open at the time provided by the law?** YES NO
Was the polling place ready on time before the scrutiny started?
 If not, comments:

General atmosphere (*underline your choice*)

VERY GOOD	QUITE GOOD	RATHER POOR	VERY POOR
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Other comments by observers

Signature of observers:

ANNEX II

Questionnaire to be completed for each polling station

Part to be completed in the polling station

Names of observers: _____	Team Number: I _____ I
Polling Station: Municipality: _____	Station Name: _____ Station Number: I _____ I
Time of arrival at polling station: _____	Time of leaving station: _____
Number of persons registered on electoral list: I _____ I on any additional list: I _____ I (moved to heading of annex I)	
Number of voters at time of arrival: _____	I _____ I

- Is **the polling station** clearly signposted? YES NO Is it of adequate size? YES NO
- Is the polling station easily accessible (e.g. for persons with disabilities)? YES NO
- Are the configuration and size of the polling station adequate for the voting process? YES NO

Persons present at the polling station

- Is the electoral commission's membership in compliance with legal requirements? YES NO
- Presence of observers..... YES NO Are they accredited? YES NO
- Do they comply with the need for diversity of candidates/lists? (*Refer to next page for the list of political affiliations*) ... YES NO
- Presence of police inside the polling station..... YES NO (*> if yes, specify facts overleaf*)
- Are unauthorised persons present? YES NO If yes, who? YES NO
- Presence of **campaign material propaganda** (posters, individuals carrying out campaigning activities):
- In the polling station YES NO - outside and near the polling station YES NO
- In favour of which party or candidate?
- Intimidation of electors: were there any attempts? YES NO (*> if yes, specify facts overleaf*)

Conduct of operations (*> note any additional remarks or precisions overleaf*)

(*Optional question according to the legislation in force in the country*) YES NO

- Is the check on inking of voters' fingers effective at the entrance of the polling station? YES NO
- Is the check on voters' identity effective? YES NO
- Are the ballot papers distributed properly? YES NO
- Is ballot box properly sealed? YES NO
- Voting booths: are they placed where they can be seen YES NO Same question for the YES NO
by members of the commission and observers? ballot box
- ~~Voting booths and ballot box: are they placed where they can be seen by members of the commission and observers? YES NO~~

- Does voting take place in a calm, orderly manner? YES NO
- Have you noticed any cases of group voting? (*if yes, complete section 2 on the next page*) YES NO

Voting by sick persons or persons with reduced mobility (Mobile ballot box)

- Is the mobile ballot box properly sealed? YES NO

Other procedures – if any – for sick persons

- Do they respect voting secrecy? YES NO

Overall assessments after the visit (*underline your choice*)

VERY GOOD	QUITE GOOD	RATHER POOR	VERY POOR
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Signature of observers:

Part to be completed after leaving the polling station

1 – Political affiliations of polling station’s members

(Before the election, prepare forms to be completed below by those political parties/candidates in contest)

<i>Delegates of parties/candidates</i>	<i>Local and international observers</i>
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2 – Additional comments by observers

Please note any events out of ordinary (disorder or intimidation in and near the polling station, other activities in the polling station, level of representation of women among candidates, among polling station members, access of persons with reduced mobility to the polling station...)

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3 - Facts reported to the observers

(Mention identity of person reporting facts if possible)

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4 - Any recommendations to be made in the observation report

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Questionnaire on observation of the vote counting

Name of observers: _____	Team Number: I ____ I
Polling Station: Municipality: _____ Station District Name: _____	Station Number: I ____ I
Time of arrival at the station: _____	Time of leaving the station: _____

Did voting finish at the time provided by the law? YES NO

Was the voting closed at the right time?
 If not, why not? YES NO

At the close of voting, were there voters still present unable to vote? YES NO

Persons Present

Did the election commission have a quorum at the close of polling? YES NO

Were any representatives/candidates admitted to the room after the official close of polling? YES NO

Were they present in order to be able to see the votes being counted? YES NO

Is public (electors) admitted? YES NO

Counting Operations

Are the members of the polling station familiar with the procedures? YES NO

Are unused ballots invalidated before counting? YES NO

Are the seals on the ballot box intact prior to opening? YES NO

Does counting take place calmly? YES NO

Are the procedures stipulated by the electoral law **followed/complied with**? YES NO

Spoilt ballot papers

Is the decision to invalidate a ballot paper taken in accordance with the electoral law? YES NO

Is it made transparently (paper shown to delegates, observers...)? YES NO

Does the number of spoilt papers seem to you to be excessive normal

Do you consider principal grounds for invalidating justified? YES NO

Are spoilt ballots kept? YES NO

Declaration of results

Are the results of voting declared clearly according to the electoral law? YES NO

Are the results posted at the door of the polling station in accordance with the electoral law? YES NO

Functioning of the electoral commission centralising the results

Transport of documents: is the security assured and carried out in compliance with the electoral law? YES NO

Are observers and party representatives allowed to be present? YES NO

Do you notice any distortion of results between the polling station and the central electoral commission?..... YES NO

Overall assessment of the quality of counting at the polling station

VERY GOOD	QUITE GOOD	RATHER POOR	VERY POOR
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General comments by the observers

Overleaf: statement of the results of the polling station (optional)

Signature of observers:

