

Elections: president speaking of democracy, opposition of boycott possibility

The Belarusian authorities started to enforce the president Lukashenka's declarations regarding democratic character of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. After inviting OSCE observers the Central Elections Commission granted 42 seats in the district election commissions to the oppositional applicants. This represents more than 30 percent of all oppositional applications, which can be interpreted as a move forward in fulfilling the requirements of Brussels. On the other hand it still represents only 2.2 percent of the total number of seats in the regional commissions. In the meantime the poll shows the decreasing popularity of the president and his agenda.

According to a poll by the Independent Institute for Social, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) 43 per cent of respondents think fewer people would be willing to vote for Lukashenka now compared to 2006, when he won the presidential election. In addition, 53.8 per cent of respondents say change is more important to them at this point, while 37.4 per cent argue for the preservation of the status quo.

Though the results speak about the president rather than the parliament, the public moods may have implications also in September when the elections to the House of Representatives take place. Elections offer a unique chance to present the activities of opposition to the wider public.

The opposition, though, remains fragmented. With several groups not joining the UDF (United Democratic Forces) effort to take part in the elections (e.g. regional representations of the opposition party "United Civil Party" will boycott the parliamentary elections, if its members are not admitted in the district electoral commissions or the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, which is considering a boycott too) the common approach has not been accommodated. Even the UDF reserves the right not to take part in the elections and withdraw its candidates just before the vote if necessary.

Sources: Interfax, Angus Reid Global Monitor, European Exchange

Venezuelan leader visits Belarus

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was making his third visit to Belarus in July after he visited Russia during his European tour. He received the "Friendship of Nations" award from the Belarusian leader Lukashenka. They both then expressed the will to strengthen the alliance in fighting against the U.S. hegemony in international affairs and called for the creation of a multi-polar world.

One of the most important purposes for the visit was an oil agreement expanding cooperation in the energy sector between the two countries. The agreement includes the creation of the joint venture BeloVenezolana, which is expected to roughly triple the capacity of the existing joint venture to two million tons of oil a year.

Stronger energetic ties between Venezuela and Belarus are, among others, a result of the Belarus seeking alternative sources of supply after last year disputes with Russia over energy prices.

Source: AFP