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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DENOUNCES MASS ELECTION FRAUD IN UKRAINE AS CIS UPHOLDS OFFICIAL RESULTS

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The entire international community has condemned the second round of the Ukrainian presidential election, held on November 21. The only exception has been the CIS Election Observers Mission, a body established in Russia in 2003 that brings together most CIS member states. CIS Executive Secretary Vladimir Rushailo, head of the election mission to Ukraine, noted that the second round was an improvement on the first, a view that contradicted Western governments and international organizations (Interfax, November 21). CIS observers reported that the elections were "legitimate and of a nature that reflected democratic standards" (*Ukrayinska pravda*, November 22). In contrast, the Civic Voters Committee in Ukraine, which deployed 10,000 observers, and the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations, which deployed 1,100 observers, both condemned round two as not being "free and fair."

The CIS Election Observation Mission never attempted to be impartial. They supported Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich and condemned his opponent, Viktor Yushchenko, in their printed materials. One letter sent by a CIS observer to Ukrainian voters warned that a Yushchenko victory "would lead to Ukrainian politics being dictated by American activists" (*Ukrayinska pravda*, October 28).

Russia's position on the elections has flip-flopped many times. During round one, Russia blatantly intervened, only to have its intrusion backfire. Between rounds one and two, Russia adopted a relatively neutral position, even giving television airtime to Yushchenko's aides. The Russian Ambassador to Ukraine, Viktor Chernomyrdin, even stated his willingness to work with whomever was elected in round two.

The same flip-flopping occurred after round two. Putin reportedly telephoned Yanukovich Monday (November 22) to congratulate him on his "convincing victory," only to backpedal on Tuesday, saying that he had been referring to exit polls conducted by the Yanukovich team, not the official results. The Bush administration summoned the Russian Ambassador and complained about Russia recognizing Yanukovich before the Central Election Commission had released the final results (*Washington Post*, November 23).

In round one, the only observers not criticizing the conduct of the elections were a group of former U.S. congressmen, whose visit to Ukraine was paid for by Alexei Kiselev, Yanukovich's representative in the United States, and the CIS. But the congressmen criticized the conduct of round two, possibly due to negative publicity about the group from other former U.S. congressmen (*Washington Times*, November 14) and an expose in the *Washington Post* (November 20).

The Ukrainian authorities have been caught off guard by the widespread accusations of massive election fraud, from both Ukrainian citizens and international organizations. After round one, the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), which brings together the parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE, Council of Europe, NATO, and the European Parliament, concluded that the elections "did not meet a considerable number of OSCE commitments and Council of Europe and other European standards for democratic elections" (www.osce.org/odihr). The IEOM complained that the authorities had failed to take remedial action to deal with their complaints so these would not arise again in round two: "Overall, state executive authorities and the Central Election Commission (CEC) displayed a lack of will to conduct a genuine democratic election process." NATO's Parliamentary Assembly expressed a similarly strong view, and the Council of Europe threatened -- again -- to suspend Ukraine's membership if the results were not changed.

The EU, which has been largely inactive in the elections, issued a statement by Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, stating that he doubted the official results "reflected the will of the Ukrainian electorate" (AP, November 23). This view echoed the critical statements made by the EU after the first round.

Both Germany and Britain complained publicly about the unwillingness of the authorities to respect the "will of the people" (AP, November 2). British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said the election appeared "neither free . . . nor fair" (AP, November 23). British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who is a close friend of Putin's, has remained silent.

The growing opposition from Ukrainian diplomats may be encouraging greater Western criticism. On November 22, four senior diplomats at the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington DC issued a strong condemnation, and 150 other senior diplomats signed an open statement describing Yushchenko as Ukraine's new legitimate president. "We cannot remain silent and observe a situation which could call into doubt Ukraine's democratic development and destroy the efforts of many years to return our country to Europe," the statement read. Ukraine needs a leader who commands "trust" and "personal moral authority" (Reuters, November 23).

It took the Bush administration until October to begin to adopt a more critical tone towards the election. The U.S. Mission to the OSCE issued a strong condemnation after round one. Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) was sent to Ukraine as President George W. Bush's personal representative to cover the second round. Lugar complained that round two had been marred by "widespread political intimidation and failure to give equal coverage to candidates in the media. Physical intimidation of voters and illegal use of governmental administrative and legal authorities had been evident and pervasive." Senator Lugar complained, "A concerted and forceful program of election day fraud and abuse was enacted with either the leadership or cooperation of government authorities."

An additional statement issued by the White House urged the Ukrainian authorities to "review the conduct of the election" and not finalize the results "until investigations of organized fraud are resolved." It ended by stating, "The United States stands with the Ukrainian people in this difficult time."

A resolution submitted to the U.S. Senate by Senator John McCain (R-AZ) encouraged the president to "consider visa bans and other targeted sanctions" against those responsible for election fraud. Between rounds one and two, the United States added two more Yanukovich allies to its visa blacklist: Prosecutor-General Gennadiy Vasyliiev and Interior Minister Mykola Bilokin (*Washington Times*, November 18). The governors of Sumy and Kirovohrad, two regions where election fraud has been particularly severe, were added later.

Depending on the outcome of Ukraine's post-election crisis, other individuals could be banned from traveling to the United States, including outgoing President Leonid Kuchma, Yanukovich, most members of the presidential administration and government, as well as the majority of regional governors (obozrevatel.com.ua).