

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



**FINAL REPORT  
POLAND  
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 13 OCTOBER 2019**

**INTRODUCTION**

Between the 8th and 13th of October 2019, the European Dialogue and Democracy Association (EDDA) conducted a short-term Election Observation Mission to the parliamentary elections of the national assembly and senate in Poland.

Our mission consisted of 12 short-term observers (STOs) headed by Kaia Sølverød, David Waade and Iselin Berg Mulvik. On Election Day EDDA's STOs were divided into 5 teams each accompanied by one local interpreter. The teams visited 67 polling stations across various neighbourhoods in Warsaw. In this report, we summarise the main findings from the opening, general and closing procedures that our interpreters observed.

Prior to Election Day, our STOs spent four days in Warsaw getting acquainted with the most recent political developments and context of relevance to the election. In order to do so, they met with relevant international and national organizations and institutions who informed extensively on the political, economic, legal and social situation in Poland. The Polish parliamentary elections took place amid a controversial judicial reform, value-based polarisation and a divisive media environment.

The STOs were officially accredited by the Central Election Commission (CEC), and the EOM complied to international standards for election observation, as well as to the election law of Poland. Prior to the EOM, the STOs received training in terms of the OSCE/ODIHR Comprehensive E-Learning course. During the stay in Warsaw, the STOs also participated in a seminar with a local election observation group in order for the STOs to obtain a better understanding of the electoral procedures and the Polish electoral law.

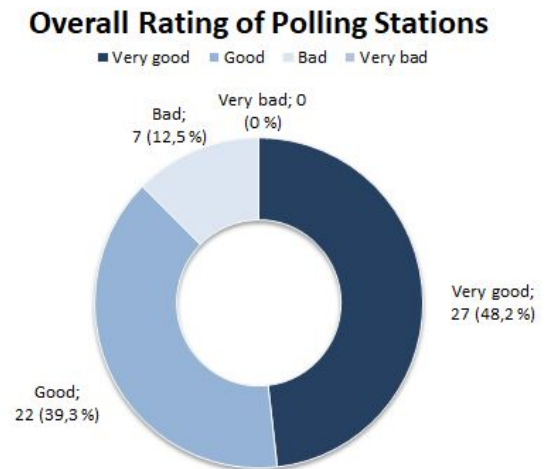
**OPENING PROCEDURES**

Our observers found some discrepancies in the performance of the polling station officials (PSO) during the opening procedure. Three teams rated the procedure as "very good", and two teams as "bad". The main reason for the poor score in two polling stations was that the

observers were refused entrance or insight into the preparations of the opening of the polling station. This meant that two groups did not witness the announcement of voting lists, ballot papers and the condition of the ballot packages. Another sign of discrepancy among the stations visited was the difference in the amount of PSOs present at each station, ranging from 6 to 12 persons. There was, however, perfect gender balance among the PSO chairpersons. The five stations observed for the opening procedure opened on time and all the necessary election material was available at 7 o'clock.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Overall, the voting process was assessed positively (*good or very good*) in 49 of the 55 polling stations observed during the general procedures. The overall attitude towards the observers, and the transparency of the voting procedures, were regarded by EDDA's STOs as positive. Almost all (53/55) of the observed polling stations reported that they had opened for voting on time (7 am).



Observers reported that voters with disabilities faced challenges in terms of access in a considerable number of the polling stations. 20 of the 55 polling stations were characterized by the observers as challenging for disabled voters, while 32 were deemed to have sufficient access. STOs also reported that the access to vote for blind and vision-impaired voters was convoluted due to the design of the braille ballots. The ballots were reported to only contain the numbers for the candidates and not their names, rendering them difficult to use.

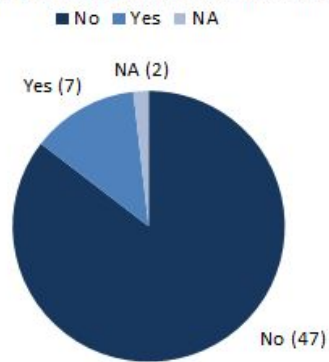
## SECURITY OF THE VOTE

A recurring factor in the general observation reports by our observers was a disregard for the secrecy of the vote. Approximately 20% of the visited PSs were described by the observers as overcrowded or chaotic, wherein 15% of these also were deemed insufficient in terms of physical size in relation to the number of registered voters. While election booths were present in almost every polling station visited by the observers, the appropriateness of the booths themselves varied greatly. Approximately 70 % of the polling stations observed were not up to standard. This included lacking screens, multiple chairs behind each voting booth, and installed booths that fail to provide for the secrecy of vote in one way or another (40 of the 55 visited polling stations). Our STOs also observed that voters tended to cluster around the voting booths. Occurrences of group and family voting were registered by the observers in 46 out of the 55 polling stations observed (83,6 %). As a result, the secrecy of the vote was only adhered to in 7 out of 54 polling stations observed (12,9 %).

## PSO PERFORMANCE

The depth and amount of training for polling station officials and the chairperson were reported by the STOs to vary. The STOs observed that the majority (77,7 %) of PSOs appeared sufficiently trained. This number increased slightly in terms of the training of the chairperson (87 %). The median duration of training was reported by the committees to consist of 3-4 hours of courses for chairpersons, and 2 hours for PSOs. However, the self-reported duration for the training of chairpersons varied, ranging from one 15 minute course to three 2-hour courses over three days.

Did voters mark their ballots in secrecy?



In general, it was reported by the observers that the PSOs projected a very good understanding of the voting procedures (94,5 %) and that voting procedures seemed to be followed in almost all (92,7 %) of the PSs we visited. Simultaneously, the process was considered to be transparent in all but one of the visited polling stations, and almost all PSOs showed a positive attitude towards the observers during the general observation. Consequently, the performance in 96,3 % of the observed PSs was deemed positive by the STOs. Yet, the overcrowding and family voting that took place in a majority of the polling stations made it hard sometimes for the PSOs to manage and keep oversight of their polling stations.

## CLOSING PROCEDURES

The five teams of observers attended the closing procedure in various different neighbourhoods of Warsaw. Their overall impression was “very good” (3 out of 5 groups) and “good” (2 out of 5). The counting was transparent, professional and followed the requirements thoroughly. The observers were in no instance prevented from observing the counting, but one group was refused a copy of the protocol. No big irregularities were observed and disagreements and recountings were generally completed or resolved in a peaceful and orderly manner.

The observers did, however, raise some procedural concerns. In one polling station, the officials split up and counted the votes for the Sejm and the Senate simultaneously. In another, the final result was written in the protocol with a pencil. Last but not least, our observers noted that the Citizen coalition had a confusing square around its logo while the other parties had not. Several voters ticked the wrong box and had their votes deemed invalid as a result of this confusion.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

EDDA's main take-outs from the Polish parliamentary elections in Warsaw were the frequent occurrences of family voting and lack of secrecy of the votes. This was mainly due to overcrowding and a lack of appropriate space. In some instances, there was also a lack of voting material and areas to facilitate voting for disabled persons. Furthermore, the format of the voting ballot caused confusion for the voters of the Citizen coalition. Under these circumstances, however, the polling station officials were generally professional in their preparation and management of the voting stations and the counting procedure. The election proceeded in a peaceful manner, and the observers most often rated the procedures as good and satisfactory.