

Ukrainian Presidential Election Observations



The first round of Ukraine's presidential election was held on Sunday, March 31. As official international observers under Committee on Democracy, we traveled to Nikopol in the south of the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. This district has about 120 polling stations with around 2000 voters each. Divided into teams of two, with a driver and interpreter, if necessary, we covered about 85 of the stations throughout the day and then "locked in" at a final station for the counting of votes.



Nikopol rolled out the red carpet. We had an hour long discussion with the mayor, Andriy Fisak, and Sergiy Bondarenko, development coordinator. Nikopol is an important metallurgical center and its steel mill once employed 25,000 and specialized in pipe. It was a coveted asset for the Nazis and Communists in WW2 and suffered dearly. It still produces 25% of the world's stainless steel tubing. The region is very proud of its heritage as the center of Cossack culture. The local museum was impressive for its collection and displays.



A traditional Cossack cross.



A decontamination suit from Chernobyl



Gravesite and monument to Ivan Sirko, a prominent Cossack hetman

Ukrainian Election Procedure by the Numbers



At 7:15am the administrative staff of each polling station opens a meeting. The staff is up to 16 people, all representing different candidates. The head, deputy head and secretary run the polling station. First, blank ballots are counted and recorded. Registers are checked - two sets, one against the other. At 8am the polls officially open for voting. (1) Voters provide a government ID and are checked against the register and enter their signature. (2) The top portion of the ballot, the counterfoil, is filled out, the voter signs again and then it is torn off and the voter is given a ballot.



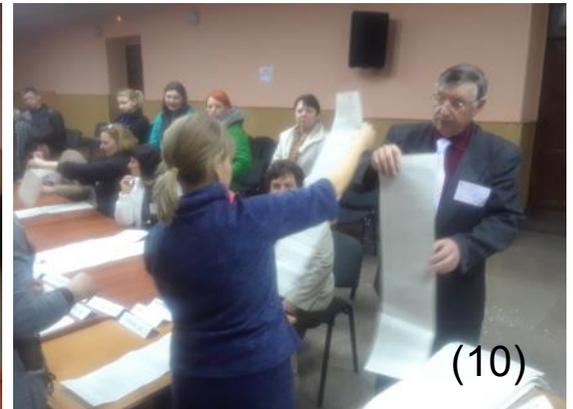
(3) Ballot in hand, the voter proceeds to a private booth to mark the ballot, then (4) they place it in a (5) sealed ballot box. A staff member (L) records the number of ballots going into the boxes. Polls close at 8pm. Then the fun begins. We finished early, about 12:30am. We have gone as late as 5am.



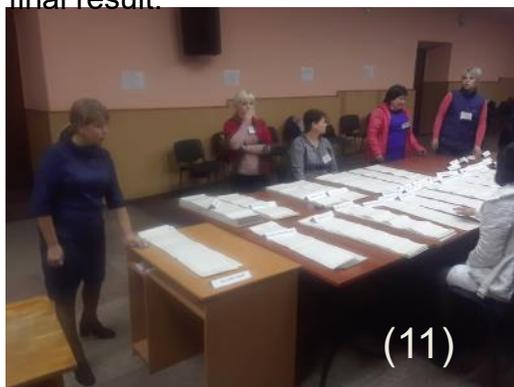
We chose a polling station in the village of Oleksiivka outside of Nikopol on a finger of the Dnipro River for a final stop. It was quiet, peaceful, and the people were very friendly. No observers had ever been there before. Plus it had a large well lit room, good bathrooms, and comfortable chairs - all important considerations! Steve Mitchell, COD Coordinator, and I talked with a voter who attended this school and now teaches English there. Class pictures adorned the walls and when I asked the poll workers how many were in the photos almost all hands went up. Life in small town Ukraine is not much different than the US.



After the poll closes, it is all business. First all the unused ballots are counted and (6) the corners are cut off to invalidate them. The counterfoils are counted (7) and the number of signatures in the register. These two numbers should match. The counter foils plus the number of unused ballots should also equal the original number of ballots taken from the safe that morning. Once all ballots are accounted for numerically, the work begins on the ballots in the boxes.



The box seals are verified intact and (8) then removed. Ballots are dumped on the table (9) and counted for each box. A great cheer goes up when the number matches the previously calculated number. Next the ballots are sorted one by one (10) based on the candidate marked. Disputed ballots were quickly resolved by a vote of committee members. Finally, (11) each stack of ballots is counted and recorded for each candidate. This election had a record 39 candidates and maybe 20 did not receive a vote in this station. The registers, counterfoils, unused ballots, and recorded ballots are all sealed, labeled and attested to and stamped by the secretary(12). The coveted protocol(13), or vote tally, is the final result.



(13)

Указавши кандидата, від якого участь у виборчій діяльності після цього треба діяти належним чином

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№	Прізвище, ім'я та по батькові кандидата	Кількість голосів
1	БАЛАШОВ Геннадій Петрович	3
2	БЕГМЕРТНИЙ Роман Петрович	0
3	БОГОМОЛЬЦЬ Ольга Валентина	1
4	БОГОСЮВСЬКА Ірина Германівна	2
5	БОЙКО Юрій Анатолійович	169
6	БОНДАР Віктор Васильович	1
7	ВАШЕНКО Олександр Михайлович	0
8	ВІСКУЛ Олександр Юрійович	1
9	ГАБЕР Микола Олександрович	0
10	ГРИШЕНКО Анатолій Степанович	64
11	ДАШЛЕЖ Олександр Володимирович	0
12	ДЕРЕВ'ЯНКО Юрій Богданович	1
13	ЖУРАВЬОВ Василь Михайлович	0
14	ЗЕЛЕНСЬКИЙ Володимир Олександрович	553
15	КАШІНІ Сергій Михайлович	0
16	КАРМАНІЙ Юрій Анатолійович	1
17	КІВНА Ірина Володимирівна	1
18	КОРНАЦЬКИЙ Аркадій Олександрович	0
19	КОШУЛІНСЬКИЙ Руслан Володимирович	6
20	КРІВЕНКО Віктор Михайлович	2
21	КУПЦІВ Віктор Михайлович	0
22	ЛІТВИНЕНКО Юлія Леонідівна	2
23	ЛІШКО Олег Валерійович	23
24	МОРОЗ Олександр Олександрович	0
25	НАЛІВАЙЧЕНКО Валентин Олександрович	0
26	НАСТРОВ Роман Михайлович	0
27	НОВАК Андрій Яремович	0

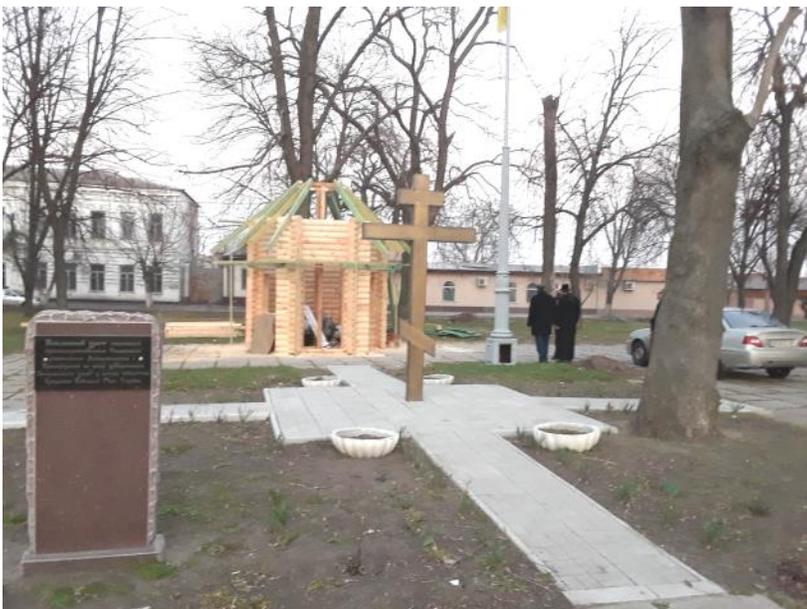


The diligent hard work of this committee was inspiring. The professional, organized manner in which they approached their duties ensured that the election in this precinct was free and fair. Head of precinct, Natal Bichkova (l) and Deputy Head Lucy Sribna (r) with Steve Mitchell and myself at the end of the night.

Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Nikopol



On Saturday before the election we had an opportunity to spend time with Father Mercarius. He is the only priest of the newly sanctioned Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Nikopol. He had previously been a priest in the now named Russian Orthodox Church but switched allegiance after serving as a chaplain on the front lines for two years with the Ukrainian forces. The area is still predominated by the ROC. The square in the pictures is where an Orthodox church once stood until burned to the ground by the Communists decades ago. In recent years the ROC was permitted to erect a small chapel on the site. A year ago Mecarius and the UOC were permitted to erect a cross on the square but when they petitioned the city authorities to build a church there they were rebuffed. After being refused permission to build even a small chapel, they took matters into their own hands and built the wooden structure in the photo in the preceding two days. They currently hold services



and a school for 25 children in an area of less than 100 square meters. Father Mercarius is one of the many Ukrainians fighting for freedom from the old structures and strictures. The Committee on Democracy is likewise committed to helping promote and ensure free and fair elections with equal access for all voters.

