

Parliamentary campaigning period – digest of the 2016 parliament elections

This report covers campaign developments that occur during the Belarusian parliamentary ‘campaigning period,’ which lasts from the end of candidate registration on August 11 until Election Day, September 11. It focuses on candidate campaigning, particularly TV appeals and debates, candidate pickets, and meetings with voters.

During the campaigning period, democratic candidates emphasised the “absence of free and fair elections,” as well as their approaches to socio-economic problems. Candidates presented party programmes like “[One Million New Jobs](#)” or “[People’s Program](#)” as possible solutions to political and economic problems.

A portion of the opposition candidates put traditional opposition white-red-white flags on their speaking tribunes during speeches and debates. The call to action differed among democratic candidates. Some [called](#) on people to join their parties or participate in election observation.

Others [emphasised](#) the importance of voter participation, discouraged indifference, and urged voters to cast ballots on Election Day. There were [attempts](#) by officials to limit communications of certain democratic candidates by refusing to broadcast TV appeals, rejecting programs, or forbidding the re-publishing of TV appeals on the Internet.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has observed that a notable aspect of parliamentary election campaigning in 2016 in comparison with recent elections is the shift of most opposition forces’ communications away from internal conflicts

and towards voter outreach based on socio-economic issues. The bitter accusations and fierce public infighting that dominated the independent media and enhanced perceptions of a dysfunctional opposition have largely vanished from the 2016 political discourse.

Instead of caustic rhetoric against each other, the majority of opposition forces are focused on communicating with voters based on key socio-economic issues and offering critiques of the authorities' management, and in some cases articulating alternative visions to solve the country's problems.

Democratic candidates continued to criticise the incumbent authorities, some quite harshly

Democratic candidates continued to criticise the incumbent authorities, some quite harshly, in what can be considered traditional opposition rhetoric aimed at a traditional opposition electorate, but these attacks and other traditional opposition issues, like calls for free and fair elections, were often grounded in themes that are relevant to a broader audience, such as the creating jobs, improving roads or developing rural regions.

The shift away from internal fights and towards building public support might be attributed to the decision of most major political forces to actively participate in the elections. With many pursuing a similar approach, there is little need to focus on divisions. The busy work of running campaigns and talking with voters might also be leaving little room for playing political games on the side. The change might also reflect the recognition that past squabbles significantly damaged public credibility and that the path to a successful future depends on breaking out of the existing mold to build the trust and support of the public.

The final week of campaigning, September 6-10, overlaps with the start of the early vote period. Nearly [seven million](#)

eligible Belarusian voters are able to begin casting ballots for one of nearly 500 candidates running in 110 districts. Election Day itself is Sunday, September 11. In the last presidential election government reports [showed](#) that more than one-third of voters voted early. Election observers [criticise](#) the early vote period as being prone to government abuses, including forced voting, artificially inflating turnout through protocol manipulation and vote count.

Campaigning Opportunities and ✖ Limitations

Each registered candidate was entitled to one five-minute television and radio speech and the publication of their program in the newspaper; additionally, brief debates (five minutes of airtime for each candidate) on state TV were held if at least two candidates agreed to participate. Speeches were broadcast on state-owned channels between August 15 and September 2. Additionally, nearly 30 candidates [participated](#) in debates on “Belsat” TV channel. Topics included culture, regional development, economy, foreign affairs, domestic politics, and social policy. Copies of all debate programs can be found on ePramova.org/debate.

Officials found means to restrict the public discussion of issues raised in TV appeals or candidate programmes. Newspapers declined the publication of some programmes, claiming the programmes violated the Electoral Code. The state TV channels did not broadcast some of filmed candidate appeals. For instance, two regional newspapers [rejected](#) the program of the United Civil Party (UCP) candidate Nikolay Ulasevich, a “persistent opponent” of Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) construction. His TV appeal was [not broadcast](#) either.

Pavel Stefanovich, who advocates for “marijuana legalisation,” was deprived of publication of his program

UCP candidate Pavel Stefanovich, who advocates for “marijuana legalisation,” was deprived of publication of his program and the broadcast of his speech. The program of UCP contender Yuriy Hashevatskiy, which mentioned “twenty years of authoritarian regime,” was [rejected](#) by “Vecherniy Minsk” newspaper.

The “Vecherniy Brest” newspaper initially [rejected](#) the program of Igor Maslovskiy, Belarusian Social-Democratic Party Gramada (BSDP-G) candidate, as it included the call “not to support pro-governmental candidates.” An additional problem noted by Maslovskiy was unequal circulation of issues with candidate programs. Maslovskiy, who succeeded in getting his program published after appeals, [noted](#) that the “Vecherniy Brest” newspaper gave his program a circulation of 4,300 copies. Meanwhile, the issue including his opponent’s (Vladimir Bazanov, incumbent member of parliament) program had 10,000 copies in circulation.

Hashevatskiy’s TV appeal was broadcast on state television, but after [it was re-published](#) on YouTube and became viral on non-state media outlets, “Beltelecom” [requested](#) its removal, and warned other candidates not to republish their speeches due to copyright infringement. In 2015, however, state TV broadcast the speeches of presidential candidates on their website. Nevertheless, the restriction seemed to invigorate re-publishing speeches and debates on [YouTube](#) and other websites.

General Trends in Candidate

TV Appeals and Debates

Some Belarus Popular Front (BPF) candidates focused on foreign affairs and international economic issues, emphasizing the value of the country's independence. For instance, BPF Chair Alexey Yanukevich [proposed](#) changing the direction of Belarusian exports from Russia to the West. In addition, he suggested "open borders" with the European Union and the U.S. and establishing "controls" over the Belarus-Russia border to counter illegal migration and prevent the inflow of criminals and drugs.

Other BPF candidates primarily focused on domestic issues. For instance, former presidential candidate Ales Mikhalevich [raised](#) the problem of Belarus' unfavourable business environment. Yuri Meleshkevich [focused](#) on economic issues, particularly on the need to build a market economy in Belarus. Dmitriy Kasperovich in his speech, [challenged](#) the parliamentary elections, stating in Belarus "parliamentarians are appointed by the presidential administration."

Podgol delivered his speech dressed in a bulletproof vest

One of the most media-referenced candidate appeals was delivered by BPF's Vladimir Podgol. He delivered his speech dressed in a bulletproof vest. Other props included a brick, tanker helmet, decorative shells, and his book "Bullet to Lukashenka." The same title was written on his vest. Podgol [explained](#) he wanted to be unusual and catch people's attention. Analysts from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [described](#) the appeal as "post-modern." Considering the number of references, he received in the media, and the 43,000 views on [YouTube](#), it would seem Podgol succeeded in attracting attention.

In the majority of "Tell the Truth" (TtT) appeals reviewed, candidates were communicating a common theme to become a "voice of the people" in parliament and bring about "peaceful

changes.” These themes were introduced during the 2015 presidential campaign of Tatsiana Karatkevich. Some TtT candidates went further and delivered a similarly structured explanation as to what “peaceful changes” [mean](#): “the authorities who respect citizens and consult with them,” “economy which creates opportunities to work and earn decently,” and “government which ensures social protection for each.”

TtT candidates tended to raise socio-economic issues, such as the need for pension system reform, high unemployment and jobs, and an improved business environment and the crisis in the industrial sector. They also touched on the housing affordability issues, underdevelopment of regions, and infrastructure problems.

“It is possible to steal the vote, but nobody will steal your support from me”

TtT campaign Co-Chair Karatkevich [emphasised](#) the government’s implementation of ideas she advocated for in her presidential program, such as refraining from building new foreign military bases, improving relations with neighboring countries, and increasing unemployment benefits. TtT emphasised the importance of voting in elections and not being indifferent. Addressing possible election fraud, TtT Co-Chair Andrey Dmitriev [stated](#), “It is possible to steal the vote, but nobody will steal your support from me.”

“Belarusian Christian Democracy” (BCD) candidates were consistently critical of the authorities’ policies and their lack of accountability. BCD candidates tend to [challenge](#) the transparency of public spending and accountability of the authorities, claiming they are accountable “only to President and officials.” Commonly repeated phrases included: “there is no state money; there is only people’s money,” and “government for the people, not people for the government.”


BCD's Co-Chair Vitaliy Rymashevskiy, participating in state TV debates as a proxy, [proposed](#) that newly elected MPs initiate Lukashenka's impeachment. This was [reiterated](#) by BCD youth leader Marina Homich in her speech. BCD speakers raised a range of issues, such as the problem of low salaries and high prices, administrative reforms, economic development, healthcare, and anti-alcohol policies. Tatiana Severinets [addressed](#) unpopular laws approved by the parliament, such as the imposition of a tax on unemployed people.

BCD speakers [emphasized](#) their party's social values and called for the return of kindheartedness, justice, solidarity, hope for change, and strong families in Belarus. "Electoral fraud" was highlighted by BCD candidates and proxies, some of whom urged voters to join BCD or participate as observers (BCD is a part of "Right to Choose-2016" joint observation initiative).

During their speeches, "For Freedom" (FF) candidates addressed issues related to the pension system, unemployment and low salaries, parliamentary accountability poor governance and affordable housing. "Reforms, Wellbeing, and Peace" was a [slogan](#) voiced by the movement's Deputy Chair Yuri Gubarevich. Additionally, FF candidates often referenced their "Narodnaya Programa" (People's Program), a program of political and economic reforms that could solve the problems in the country.

Some of the FF candidates addressed personal and local-level problems. For instance, Viktor Yanchurevich (who presented himself as an independent candidate) [stressed](#) Minsk issues: excessive construction and the destruction of green zones. Student candidate Alina Nagornaya [emphasised](#) problems in education. Maksim Tikhonov [began](#) his speech by challenging the transparency of elections held in Belarus and giving examples of electoral fraud. According to him, "free elections" is the starting point of all reforms in the country.

United Civil Party (UCP) candidates often criticised the authorities and raised issues such as the economic crisis and

the inability of the authorities, particularly of parliament, to solve problems. Many UCP candidates held up a printed copy of the “One Million New Jobs” program, which was described as a solution to both the political and economic issues in the country. UCP Chair Anatoly Lebedko [participated](#) in debates as a proxy of party candidates. Lebedko focused on political processes and tended to emphasize the lack of rotation among  the authorities and electoral fraud.

UCP candidate Olga Mayorova [focused](#) on local issues and connected them to national problems. For example, she discussed the destruction of a local forest to highlight the lack of “independent courts, transparent budget, fair elections, and local governance.”

The previously mentioned Hashevatskiy [focused](#) his appeal on criticism of Lukashenka, the parliament, and electoral fraud. He claimed that the opposition is not weak, but people are weak because they do not support each other.

Hashevatskiy called for the return of “stolen free and fair elections.” UCP candidate Pavel Stefanovich, who was not allowed to publish his program and whose TV appeal was not broadcast due to his open advocacy for “marijuana legalization,” [took part](#) in state TV debates. There Stefanovich said he wants to implement “different drug policy,” fight for gender equality, and solve the problem of domestic violence.

Belarusian Social-Democratic Party Gramada (BSDP-G) candidate appeals addressed social justice issues corresponding to their party ideology. Anna Kanyus used her TV appeal [to urge](#) citizens not to support pro-government candidates, who failed to oppose the pension age increase or the tax on the unemployed. Additionally, she advocated for establishing a legal basis to ensure secure future for investors, business, and citizens in order to develop the new economic policy.

The BSDP-G candidate in Slutsk, Anatoly Yurevich, [emphasised](#) the need to improve Belarus' "image abroad," abolition of the [contractual system](#), and increased public control over local and central budgets in order to increase investments and ensure decent wages. Additionally, Yurevich called upon PEC commissioners to count votes fairly. Natalya Shkadun, BSDP-G candidate from Magilev, [began](#) her speech by claiming that "parliamentarians are appointed" and they do not perform their duties. As a doctor, she dedicated a large share of her speech to problems in healthcare.

One candidate raised concerns about the safety and economic reasonability of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant

"Belarusian Party – The Greens" (or Green Party) ran five candidates. They focused on sustainable development in the country, particularly ecology issues, renewable energy and a green economy. For instance, Dmitriy Kuchuk [focused](#) on the construction of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). He raised concerns about the safety and economic reasonability of the plant. In the end of the appeal, Kuchuk [put](#) on a gas mask. Later, Kuchuk explained to [TUT.BY](#) that he intended to attract people's attention as most of the people in his Ostrovets constituency do not watch "Belarus 3" TV channel. According to Kuchuk, this small performance helped him to get views on [YouTube](#) (over 8,000) and coverage on a number of mass media outlets.

"Fair World" (FW) candidate Mikhail Korotkevich [emphasised](#) their party's program to "ensure the sustainable development of the country and increase people's well-being." The proposals are intended to optimize public expenses, increase investments, abolish paid education, subsidize pharmaceuticals and grow wages and pensions.

Candidates loyal to the authorities (whether independent or in a political party) tended to support the direction of the

country's development. The chair of the "Belarusian Patriotic Party," former presidential candidate, Nikolay Ulakhovich [addressed](#) patriotism and the importance of peace.

The leader of the Republican Party of Labor and Justice (RPLJ) Vasiliy Senitskiy [outlined](#) the need for reforms, in the economy and social field. He also suggested introducing a mixed parliamentary election system but refrained from emphasising any of existing problems in the country. One of 28 incumbent MPs running for reelection Valeriy Baradzenya [said](#) in his introductory statement during the debates there should be "fewer laws, they should become more understandable, and we should be proud of our achievements."

Democratic Candidates Aim to Reach Voters Through Campaigning Pickets and Meetings

On September 5, the CEC announced that candidates for parliament informed them of their plans to organize [180,355](#) pickets and [3,459](#) meetings with voters (obviously, not all declared events were really held). Most were traditional events, but a few were covered more in the media because of issues raised or how they were organized.

Recently, the Center-Right coalition (BCD, UCP, and FF) candidates and activists [marched](#) to the "Beltelecom" building in Minsk, where they criticised the state television and delivered an appeal demanding opposition receive a regular access to airtime on state TV. They also called for the establishment of the independent public television station. On August 25, Center-Right coalition forces [organized](#) a picket to mark the anniversary of the State Sovereignty Declaration.

UCP held several pickets to engage the public. In mid-August, Lebedko and his deputy Nikolay Kozlov together with registered candidate Denis Tihonenko [held](#) pickets in front of Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ) and Minsk Automobile Works (MAZ) to distribute literature which covered their “One Million New Jobs” program. Lebedko and Kozlov also [held](#) rallies for “Police Against Falsifications” in front of Minsk police departments to distribute “Narodnaya Volya” newspaper, which included an article “on falsifications during elections,” to police officers.

BPF also [organised](#) a Minsk picket on August 25, “Independence Day.” BPF’s candidates Vladimir Podgol and Ales Talstyko [organised](#) several public artistic performances that satirically criticize the authorities and their [policies](#). The media widely [covered](#) a picket of the BPF candidate Vadim Saranchukov, who campaigns in Hrodna for eliminating cross-border restrictions for people living on the border of Belarus and neighbouring Poland or Lithuania.

On August 16, several TtT candidates and the campaign leadership [held](#) a joint picket in Minsk to mark the beginning of the campaigning period. The picket was held under the slogan “Peaceful Changes – Wellbeing in Every Home.” On September 4, three TtT candidates on the occasion of “Minsk Marathon” [organised](#) a picket called “Marathon for Peaceful Changes.”

“Green” party candidates [raised](#) ecology issues. “Green” candidates were seen campaigning in Svetlogorsk [against](#) construction of a chemical enterprise, urging people to vote for their candidate. On August 25, in a joint picket with UCP and BSDP-G in Grodno, “Green” candidate Tatyana Novikova addressed safety concerns related to the construction of Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Ostrovets. Another picket against the Belarusian NPP construction, Novikova and Kuchuk [held](#) in Ostrovets.

The pickets by BSDP-G candidates, which were covered by media, suggest that the party candidates focused on social problems. On August 23 and 28, in Brest, Igor Maslovskiy and Anna Kanyus [organised](#) pickets called “For Construction of Kindergartens and Schools in the Region.” In Mogilev, BSDP-G together with UCP, BPF, and BCD [held](#) a joint campaigning picket for “restoring the social justice.”

Domestic observers, “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” ([HRD](#)) and “Right to Choose-2016” ([R2C](#)), reported a number of incidents related to violations of equal conditions for all candidates, such as restriction on mass meetings or attempts of officials to disrupt candidate pickets or meetings with voters, and violations by non-democratic candidates related to production of campaigning materials.

“pro-government candidates actively participate in socially-significant events” and “use administrative resources”

In addition, HRD [noted](#) in their recent report that “pro-government candidates actively participate in socially-significant events” and “use administrative resources.” R2C, in their [report](#) on the campaigning period, stressed “censorship” of democratic candidates, some of which are referenced above and condemned the Electoral Code changes made in 2013, which deprived candidates of state funding.

Election Observation Efforts

Domestic observers are trying to engage as many citizens as possible to monitor the campaign period and elections. [ElectBy.org](#), in partnership with the HRD, R2C, and Election Observation Theory and Practice (EOTP), has been collecting reports of electoral violations through the mobile application “[Vochy](#).” In addition, HRD [announced](#) they are opening a hotline to report electoral violations.

As of September 5, 32,015 domestic observers have been [accredited](#) by election commissions. The majority of accredited observers are from pro-government public associations – 23,619, including “Belaya Rus’” (4,261), Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) (6,170), Federation of Labor Unions of Belarus (5,040).

The CEC has [accredited](#) 821 foreign observers as of September 2. Three hundred and thirty-one are from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), 341 from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), 19 from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), 39 from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), 65 from diplomatic corps, three from the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB), nine from Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and 14 from election bodies of foreign countries.

Not all international observation groups could come to observe the Belarusian elections

Not all international observation groups could come to observe the Belarusian elections. The European Network of Election Monitoring Organisations (ENEMO) mission, which sent request for observation in June, [has not yet received](#) “any reply” from the Belarusian authorities (as of the end of August). ENEMO observers [did not](#) receive an invitation to observe the 2015 election either.

The OSCE/ODIHR and CIS election missions published interim observation reports. OSCE/ODIHR [noted](#) that a “significant number of prior OSCE/ODIHR recommendations are yet to be addressed.” Meanwhile, the CIS mission [concluded](#) that “in general, the electoral campaign is held in a calm atmosphere, in the spirit of open competition and at the high organizational level.”

Recently Alexander Lukashenka had a [meeting](#) with Kent

Harstedt, Coordinator of the short-term OSCE observation mission and Cayetana De Zulueta Owtram, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR mission. During the meeting, Lukashenka stated that he would like to see “true professionals,” regardless of their political views, in a new parliament.

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Electoral Reform in Belarus: Liberalisation or Window- Dressing?

On 6 August 2013 Alexander Lukashenka held a meeting with top officials on the proposed changes to the Election Code. Some of the announced changes could potentially serve to further tighten the government’s control over elections.

Meanwhile, the officials’ rhetoric concerning electoral reform implies that they intend to carry out these vague legislative amendments as if they were implementing Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) recommendations.

If the OSCE wants to avoid such window-dressing from the Belarusian government in future, the organisation should reconsider its approach to drafting these recommendations.

Government Solves its Problems

The first alarming aspect of the current electoral reform is the way the government is working on it. The Central Commission on Elections (the Election Commission) announced

its plans to amend the Electoral Code at the end of 2012. Since then, the public has not been given access to any draft with regards to this reform.

Some politicians have accused the Election Commission of intending to “surprise” the opposition with unexpected changes on the eve of the local elections of winter 2013-2014.

The sparse information that has been presented by state-run media reveals some amendments that the Electoral Code will probably undergo.

the amendments would place a prohibition on campaigning to boycott any elections

First, the amendments would prohibit campaigning to boycott an [election](#). During the most recent [parliamentary elections](#) of 2012, some opposition candidates used their right via state-run media to call upon citizens [not to vote](#). This irritated the authorities, who censored most of their agitation.

Second, it would introduce the removal of budgetary support for candidates’ campaign funding. When the changes enter into force, the candidates will have to establish their own “electoral funds”.

This measure could create problems for candidates who are not wealthy. Openly donating to the opposition can also be quite problematic in Belarus. During a presidential meeting held on 6 August, officials did not conceal the fact that they introduced this measure to control the candidates’ funds more effectively.

Third, the proposed reform will establish an additional level of electoral committees: territorial. This way, the government argues, it will become easier to administer the elections. Opponents are convinced that this is just another obstacle, planned to lessen the number of complaints sent to the Election Commission in order to hide the real scale of

complaints from foreign observers.

Another procedural novelty relates to defining the winner during [parliamentary elections](#). There will be no need to receive more than 50% of the ballots; victory with just a simple majority will be enough. Again, opponents suspect the government is making the work of [falsifiers](#) easier; this way, they will not need to “add” too much support to the pro-governmental candidate.

All in all, the proposed reforms seem unlikely to ease campaigning. On the contrary, the government may use them as further restrictions on independent candidates.

Window-Dressing

The Election Commission Head Lidia Yarmoshyna used interesting rhetoric to convince Lukashenka of the necessity of the changes and, in particular, of enabling candidates in local elections to generate their own funds: “Let them establish their own funding; they will not do it, but it is for the sake of democracy”.

Leaving aside the idea that the permanent Head of the Belarusian Election Commission cares about democracy, one can conclude that imitating democratisation before Western observers has become the major purpose of these reforms.

This is in line with the statements made by the Election Commission spokesman Mikalai Lazavik after every election which received an [OSCE report](#): “We will implement the OSCE recommendations *in part*”.

After the 2008 parliamentary campaign, the government adopted a group of amendments to the Electoral Code, in order, they announced “to comply with the OSCE recommendations that followed the elections”.

The changes included:

- the removal of the requirement for parties to have regional offices to field candidates in these districts (a minor procedural improvement);
- adding the word “substantial” to the mistakes in application documents that lead to candidates’ removal from the campaign (with no further explanation of what it means);
- entitling candidates to appeal the decisions of the electoral committees in court (which are heavily dependent on the government in Belarus);
- giving candidates access to state media for speeches and debates (sometimes followed by censorships, e.g. in the case of calling for boycott)

In other words, the government has introduced very limited reforms, including purely technical improvements or those that will not influence the general transparency and fairness of the elections. The authorities omitted truly significant changes. The OSCE report also pointed out several other issues, including: non-transparent ballot counting, restrictions on observers’ work, biased coverage of the opposition in the state media, the closed nature of the procedure for announcing results, the uncontrolled mass preliminary voting system, etc.

The OSCE went on to officially welcome the progress Belarus had made in its electoral reforms, but also shared its concern and regret that the work had not been fully completed. This was enough for Belarusian state propaganda to proudly proclaim something along the lines of: “Look, we are slowly progressing; the EU does not want to take notice of our progress and places unfair [sanctions](#) on us.”

The OSCE’s technical, procedural and essential recommendations were thus mixed together into one convoluted report and followed by a “balanced assessment” of the progress made by Belarus. This provided the perfect grounds for the Belarusian authorities to interpret their critics’ advice in their own

favour.

The rhetoric that has followed the deliberations of the new amendments, the focus placed on reforming the candidates' election funds (as the OSCE recommended *inter alia* in its latest report) without addressing significant gaps in the legislation means that the government may again plan to use its strategy of cherry-picking from Western recommendations to clean its hands.

How to Adjust the OSCE's Approach

The OSCE has little power to correct its participating states' policies. However, by modifying its approach towards its evaluation of Belarusian elections, it can at least stop giving a free hand to state propaganda to interpret these assessments in an improper way.

When drafting the post-election reports, the OSCE should avoid the simple thematic division of recommendations (e.g. in the fields of media, registration, voting, counting, campaigning). Instead, OSCE experts should firmly divide all the recommendations into Fundamental, on the one hand, and Technical/Subsidiary, on the other, with a sharp boundary established between them.

It is also better to avoid providing overly abstract recommendations that can work as guidance only for those governments willing to advance democratic changes. Instead, the OSCE should include only specific steps that are assessable, the progress of which can be easily measured afterwards. While assessing the legislative amendments, particularly in cases where no fundamental changes have occurred, it would be better to stress this fact.

Otherwise, the government may cherry-pick the softest recommendations and proclaim "partial compliance with the OSCE critics" while still ignoring all the essential problems.