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NDI OBSERVERS PRAISE UKRAINIANS FOR COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY, UNITY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN WELL-RUN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

KYIV, Ukraine – By conducting a generally well-run presidential election in the face of significant challenges, Ukrainians achieved a democratic milestone, according to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which released a preliminary statement today with the findings of its international election observation mission for Sunday’s polls.

“By turning out to vote yesterday across the vast majority of the country, Ukrainians did more than elect a new president,” NDI said. “They showed the world their commitment to sovereignty, unity, and democracy.”

NDI’s 38-member delegation was co-led by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, NDI’s chairman; and Ana Palacio, former foreign minister of Spain, who presented the mission’s findings at a news conference today. Their presence symbolized the importance of a trans-Atlantic commitment to a democratic Ukraine.

The NDI delegation said the democratic election can begin a process to reinforce public confidence in the country’s political institutions. “The task ahead for the new president, as well as other political and government leaders, will be to pursue open and consultative governing practices that incorporate the interests of Ukrainians from all regions of the country. The leaders must communicate effectively the prospect of short-term sacrifices and deliver on the longer-term expectations of the Euromaidan movement.”

“This was the most important election in the country’s independent history,” the mission said, noting that it came in the wake of the Euromaidan demonstrations that fundamentally altered Ukraine’s political dynamics, the occupation of Crimea, and armed separatist actions in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces aimed at derailing the elections.

The disenfranchisement of voters in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk “should not negate the fact that the vast majority of the electorate – well more than 80 percent – had the opportunity to cast their ballots for the candidate of their choice,” NDI said.

“Such disenfranchisement cannot be allowed to negate the legitimacy of elections or the mandate they provide.”

While NDI regrets any violation of voters’ rights, it noted that the source of the disenfranchisement “was caused not by authorities or political contestants interfering with the process for electoral advantage. Rather, the responsibility lies with the foreign forces occupying Ukrainian territory and armed groups seeking to derail the entire process, despite good faith efforts of electoral officials.”

The NDI delegation arrived in Kyiv on May 21 and held meetings with national political leaders, presidential candidates, election officials, senior government officials, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, the media and the diplomatic community. On May 24-25, observers deployed in teams across Ukraine, where they met with regional and local government representatives, election administrators, and political and civic leaders. On election day, the NDI teams observed voting and counting processes in 11 regions of the country.

Other members of the delegation’s leadership group were former U.S. Senator Edward “Ted” Kaufman of Delaware; former U.S. Rep. Jane Harman of California, director, president and CEO of the Wilson Center; and Matyas Eorsi, former member of parliament from Hungary and former member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The mission builds on the ongoing observations of NDI’s long-term analysts, who have worked with the Institute’s Kyiv-based staff since April, and the [findings of NDI’s April 7-11 mission](#), which included Kaufman and Eorsi. NDI also issued a May 9 [statement on separatist referendums](#) and a second pre-election statement on [May 19](#).

The NDI mission was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan nongovernmental organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information is available at www.ndi.org.

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