

Digest
World Digest: International observers say Ukrainian election was free and fair

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Ukraine

Presidential election fair, monitors say

International monitors on Monday described Ukraine's presidential election as free and fair, putting pressure on Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko to concede defeat despite a tight vote count and charges of irregularities.

Tymoshenko, the heroine of Ukraine's Orange Revolution, canceled a news conference and appeared to be mulling a court challenge as opposition leader Viktor Yanukovich held on to a lead of 3 percentage points with more than 99 percent of votes counted.

Tymoshenko's campaign has alleged vote-buying, repeat voting and efforts to block its representatives from taking seats on election boards in regions where Yanukovich's support is strongest.

But international observers said they detected no serious faults in Sunday's polling, a reversal of the position they took in the Orange Revolution five years ago when Yanukovich was accused of fabricating votes in his first Kremlin-backed bid for the presidency.

Joao Soares, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said the election was an "impressive display of democracy" and called on politicians to honor the outcome.

Tymoshenko had threatened on the eve of the vote to send supporters into the streets in a repeat of the mass protests that prevented Yanukovich from taking office in late 2004. But the only hint of her plans on Monday was a statement on her Web site quoting an expert who argued that enough violations had occurred to warrant a legal challenge.

Supporters of Yanukovich urged Tymoshenko to respect her own pro-democracy slogans and resign, while he said his victory marked "the end of the Orange epoch."

Mátyás Eörsi, an election observer from Hungary, disagreed: "Some say the Orange Revolution failed. I say, no. It is thanks to the Orange Revolution that there was a fair and democratic election."

-- Philip P. Pan



A supporter of Viktor Yanukovich joins a rally in Kiev celebrating the opposition candidate's lead in Ukraine's presidential election. (Efrem Lukatsky/associated Press)

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