

## REPORT

LYMEC / SILBA Election Observation Mission – Presidential Elections in Belarus 2006, Minsk.

LYMEC Contact Building Mission – Ukraine 2006, Kiev.

March 14<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>.



Dear reader!






My name is Gerald Folly, I'm the chairman of the International Committee from [JULIS / LSF Austria](#), the Young Liberals and Students Forum of Austria.



Between March 14 and 22 I've been to Ukraine and Belarus with [LYMEC](#) and [SILBA](#). In Ukraine we had a mission in contact building with national organisations for [LYMEC](#) and in Belarus I was election observer for [LYMEC](#) in cooperation with [SILBA](#).



To see all the pictures of this two events go to <http://belarus2006.folly.at>, for the complete report and additional activities on Belarus in Austria use <http://www.lsf.at>. Here you also can order our International newsletter as well you will find there information about the upcoming LYMEC Seminar on "The European Identity – Where does Europe end?" (May 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>) in Vienna.

For additional information on the elections in Belarus please visit <http://www.lymec.org> and <http://www.silba.dk>, the two hosting organisations. If you wish to get a deeper insight go also to <http://www.osce.org/odihr/>, OSCE had the only official election observation mission in the country at this time.

Gerald Folly  
March 30<sup>th</sup>, Vienna, Austria

	<p><b>15.02.2006</b>                  The board of <a href="#">JULIS / LSF Austria</a> together with the new International Committee (INCO) has selected its nominees for the upcoming Election Observation Mission (EOM) by the end of January and sent their applications to the <a href="#">LYMEC</a> Office. They have been Gerald Folly (WU Vienna), Ralph Janik (University Vienna) and Philipp Weingartshofer (University Vienna).</p>
	<p><b>21.02.2006</b>  <a href="#">LYMEC</a> confirmed the participation of Gerald Folly at the Seminar in Kiev and the EOM to Belarus. Altogether about 15 persons should join the <a href="#">LYMEC</a> Mission. After first proposals of going to Kiev by bus it was finally decided to going there by plane. By 01.03.2006 tickets by plane (via Amsterdam) have been booked.</p>
	<p><b>02.03.2006</b>  <a href="#">SILBA</a> asked again for a confirmation from us participants as election observers (exit-pollers) and offered the possibility of being also official election observer in Ukraine (Parliament) one week after the presidential elections in Belarus. This came slightly too late because a change of flights was at this time no longer possible.</p>
	<p><b>06.03.2006</b>                  By 06.03.2006 I could reconfirm my participation to <a href="#">SILBA's</a> responsible person, Jacob Knudsen, after being back from holidays. It seemed a little bit confusing to me that I had to do this again after having reconfirmed this some days before to <a href="#">LYMEC</a> and having already booked everything. In the afternoon my passport was sent to Vilnius, Lithuania, by express mail for the application for a visa at the embassy of the Republic of Belarus.</p>
	<p><b>12.03.2006</b>                  Sunday afternoon Jeroen Benning, the head of the <a href="#">LYMEC</a> Mission called me and informed me about problems with the issuing of visa for the entry in Belarus. Visa applications have been denied at the Belarusian Embassy in Vilnius. <a href="#">SILBA</a> will try it again on Monday, March 13<sup>th</sup> in Riga, Latvia. But there still was a big problem: Sending my passport back to Vienna would be too late for me to catch my flight on Tuesday morning (March 14<sup>th</sup>). So the solution was trying to send the passport instead to Amsterdam and pick it up there Tuesday in the morning by one of the Dutch participants of the mission.                   Therefore I was in need of an alternative travel document – at least to reach Amsterdam. An ID card would have been sufficient for this, but unfortunately I don't have one because as long as you have your international passport you won't need this for travelling. Issuing one new ID would last in Austria about two weeks and therefore was no valid solution. Because of this mess I spent some time gathering information in how to get a travel document for the next days. Maybe I could use my old passport for travelling to the Netherlands?</p>

	<p><b>13.03.2006</b></p> <p>Can I use my old passport for going to the Netherlands? This was my first question to the responsible person of the <a href="#">Central passport authority of the City of Vienna (MA 62)</a> on Monday morning. In principle yes, but if you have one new one and the old one is perforated by the authorities of course not. So the actual one was too far away, the old one invalid, a new ID card too slow and the only way was going for an “Emergency-passport”. Therefore you have to prove that your original document is unreachable due to the responsibility of other authorities (Visa issuing problems in this case) and you are just before the start of another journey where you are in need of a passport. If that’s the case you will get one passport for the duration of the journey you are approaching but not longer. Only if you can make the authorities sure you might be in need of two passports for the future you can get it for a longer duration. I definitely was in need of a permanent second passport because in the last years it happened twice that I got my passport back in the very last hours before the start of a trip. To confirm this I needed the endorsement of my organisation that in the future I’ll be again sent to such missions as these one now. Thanks to the president Georg Tschebull and the General Secretary Kyrill Lapin of <a href="#">JULIS / LSF Austria</a> I’ve got this affirmation within about three hours. In the afternoon some one to two hours before the passport office closed in Vienna I got there my second passport on the spot.</p>
	<p><b>14.03.2006</b></p> <p><i>Flights Vienna - Amsterdam - Kiev, sightseeing in Kiev.</i></p> <p>In the early morning (07:00 a.m.) I started in Vienna with KLM to Amsterdam. At the check-in the security person found something “explosive” at the first test of my luggage. After two policeman looking after my bag everything was ok and nothing found. This seemed to be a good start into the morning.</p> <p>Around noon I should meet Anja de Vries and Jeroen Benning from the Dutch Young Liberals at the airports gate to Kiev because we were booked on the same flight. But nobody waited for me because the passport didn’t arrive on time in Amsterdam and they couldn’t get emergency passports in that short time I got one the day before. At this time I had luckily a new passport with me and not only an ID card. Otherwise the journey would have been over at exactly this point. After two phone calls with Jeroen I got the ok travelling onward to Kiev five minutes prior the closing of boarding the plane.</p> <p>Arrived to Kiev a driver from <a href="#">SILBA</a> waited for me at the Airport (Borispol) and brought me to the City, to Hotel Bratislava on the left bank of the Dnjepr. That worked well, I’ve been there the first one arriving at the airport. As there was some time that afternoon and evening I went by Metro to the city center of Kiev and had a nice walk through the streets. In between that I wrote a short report of the situation to all responsible persons within <a href="#">LYMEC</a> and <a href="#">JULIS / LSF Austria</a>. Back to the Hotel Laurits Rasmussen from <a href="#">SILBA</a> was present and we discussed first the situation, then I joined the birthday party (of Rasa Maselskyte) of five Lithuanians and one Azerbaijani girl (Sevinj) who have also arrived in the afternoon. Later Dalia Venslovaite (Lithuania) and Pietro Paganini (Italy) joined us there.</p>

	<p><b><u>15.03.2006</u></b>  <i>Contact building seminar of <a href="#">LYMEC</a> together with the youth wings of <a href="#">PORA</a> and <a href="#">PRP</a>.</i></p> <p>This morning we still awaited the arrival of the head of our mission so Pietro Paganini chaired the starting seminar. <a href="#">LYMEC</a> invited representatives of two Ukrainian youth organisations interested in strengthen their relationships to <a href="#">LYMEC</a> namely the Youth wings of <a href="#">PORA</a> and <a href="#">PRP</a>. At the beginning Natasza Iskrzak (Poland) from the <a href="#">Friedrich Naumann Foundation</a> (FNST, Warsaw Office) explained the activities of her organisation and possibilities of joint seminars or actions as well as funding from <a href="#">FNST</a>.</p> <p>Together we discussed then the difficult political situation of Ukraine after the “Orange Revolution” and the changes implemented by the new government. At a later point of the exchange of information we talked about the programs of <a href="#">PORA</a> and <a href="#">PRP</a> as well about their possibilities in participating in cooperation with and / or within <a href="#">LYMEC</a>. We also had the possibility to look at campaigning material of the joint efforts of both “mother parties”.</p> <p>In the afternoon Jeroen Benning and Aloys Rigaut (<a href="#">LYMEC</a>) arrived and joined the seminar. The closing of this day ended in a common dinner in the city centre and a small sightseeing tour in the streets.</p>
	<p><b><u>16.03.2006</u></b>  <i>Continuation of the contact building seminar, afternoon a visit at <a href="#">PORA</a> + preparations for demonstrations in front of the embassy of the Republic of Belarus.</i></p> <p>Today the seminar continued. At the closing before noon we divided into two groups, one writing about the success of the Contact building mission of <a href="#">LYMEC</a>, the second creating a press statement about the situation in Belarus, the denials of visa applications for Belarus and upcoming protests in front of Belarusian embassies together with <a href="#">PORA</a>.</p> <p>Just before and during lunch we had the possibility of getting first-hand information from Thomas Køhler who was expelled together with a group of five other election observers (exit pollers) the day before from Belarus by the state authorities.</p> <p>In the afternoon SILBA started its seminar on election observing / exit polling in Russian language which was the reason nobody from <a href="#">LYMEC</a> participated there. Some of us had as result free time but five of us visited the headquarter of <a href="#">PORA</a>. Together with Jeroen Benning, Pietro Paganini, Aloys Rigaut and Jevgeni Suketsky from Moloda <a href="#">PORA</a> I joined them for a short talk to Stanislav Kutsenko, responsible board member of Moloda <a href="#">PORA</a>, Youth Wing of <a href="#">PORA</a>. After that we had the possibility to prepare one “<a href="#">LYMEC</a>-Banner” for the demonstration next day in front of the Belarusian embassy in Kiev.</p> <p>In the evening in the hotel I heard that one from <a href="#">SILBA</a> got that afternoon</p>

successfully a visa in the Belarusian embassy in Kiev on the spot. Because I didn't have one at this time I suggested to try that for me the next day as well. It was not [SILBA](#) which made the initiative, it seemed to me that they thought at this point it was already over for those not having a visa. But I didn't want to give up as long there was a chance.

At this point of time out of the LYMEC participants of the seminar only Sevinj from Azerbaijan was able and willing to go to Belarus. From all Lithuanian participants only Dalia Venslovaite thought about trying it the next day if she would have received deeper information about security concerns, the rest decided not to go due to the remaining risks. And there were still Jeroen Benning with his emergency-passport without the possibility getting a visa in there and myself without visa both willing to go to Belarus.



**17.03.2006 - Keine Fotos! - No pictures!**

*Got five minutes to twelve as last participant a visa for Belarus, therefore I participated in the afternoon in the preparation seminar of [SILBA](#), later on we took the train to Minsk.*

All [LYMEC](#) and [SILBA](#) participants with visa should meet in the lobby of the hotel in the morning so I joined them with everything packed with me. We drove together by taxis to the office of SILBA in Kiev where I separated from the group going first to TsUM (a big commercial centre) making a passport picture of mine for the visa application and then walking to the Belarusian embassy.

At eleven in the morning one woman of a travel agency waited there in front of the building. We went into a small office of an insurance company for a sufficient insurance for me and one Slovak citizen from [SILBA](#). Of course it was not possible to pay in Euro as it was told me before. So I had to withdraw money from one ATM. The first two ATMs couldn't give money so I exchanged every Euro I had in cash with me and added the rest of my Hrivnas (Ukrainian money), altogether a little bit more than 250 Euro. Back with the money in the insurance company I needed a passport-picture of the Slovak one which I hadn't with me because nobody expected that it could be necessary. So the lady from the travel agency had to make a copy from the passport itself in a copy shop nearby.

Finished all applications, insurances and inventions for Belarus the lady from the travel agency and myself entered the embassy five minutes to twelve (it closed at twelve). After some ten to fifteen minutes to wait it was our turn and without any discussion we got our visa issued. I only had to pay. After all we went to the really helpful travel agency. Of course I had to pay again.

Back in front of the building of [SILBA](#)s office I didn't know where to ring because nothing was labelled there. Luckily I had the number of Laurits Rasmussen who answered my SMS and arrived some ten minutes later.

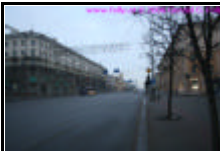
During the afternoon we had a short seminar about exit polling and the questionnaire in special. Also we've been advised how to act in the country and what to do if we would have contact with the police or secret police (KGB). Altogether we were eight people, two of them sent from LYMEC – Sevinj from

Azerbaijan and myself. Dalia Venslovaite decided not to go as the other Lithuanians did the day before. Jeroen Benning and Aloys Rigaut meanwhile did the check-out for me in the hotel because there was no time for me for going back there this afternoon.

After a short break in the afternoon which we used to look around the shops in or below the streets of Kiev we started all eight to the train station. In the train we've been separated into four groups of two, each group in a different compartment in two different wagons to ensure that we are not considered as a bigger group. Because we all had tourist visa we should behave like those. With us we had almost everyone a package of questionnaires and two to four blue jackets with "Friends across borders" on it. We should try to wear them and hand some of them over to locals in Belarus.

So we started to the direction to Minsk – Ksenia Semenova (Ukraine) and me in one wagon, the other six in the next one in three different compartments. Prior the arrival at the Belarusian border we got per SMS (out of the other wagon from Elaine Mahon, Ireland, [SILBA](#)) the information the chances are very high that all our bags will be searched very strictly. Because of this the others have thrown all their questionnaires out of the bathrooms window. We decided then to do the same and had therefore to flush all the papers down to the toilet because no window could be opened. After this we "only" had to hide our blue jackets. One of them I wore under my pullover the other we hid under our normal jackets.

When we arrived at the Belarusian side of the border the conductor came directly to me together with the Passport officer because I was the "Austrian". Following that I had the bad feeling that I was on that long list of unwelcome persons the officer had with her and she was then carefully checking whether I was there in or not. It seemed to be ok because after that she wished me a good journey and I had one entrance stamp in my visa valid from the 18<sup>th</sup> of march dating the 17<sup>th</sup> of march. At this time of the evening it was fifteen minutes to midnight, but you never know. Some minutes later we had our customs control fearing they might find our blue jackets. But in our compartment it was easy, just the question about vegetables, food and money. We say no to everything and the officer only looked below our seats. But customs control took a while for the complete wagon. In the corridor everything was opened, walls and roof-elements included. They also opened unused compartments and stayed for at least ten minutes in the next compartment. Beside this all the time many officers in four or five different walked through the corridor passing us by all the time. After about 45 minutes everything was over and the train started again. We got later one SMS from Elaine Mahon that all others had to leave the train "for their own security".



**18.03.2006**

*Only two out of eight who entered the train in Kiev arrived in Minsk, till noon resting in our apartment, then shopping food, later a meeting with other election observers.*

Slightly after six in the morning we arrived in Minsk. We went out of the train and asked the conductor of the other wagon where the other group was but she only told us they are not there any more. So we were sure about the fact only two of

us could enter the county and we only tried to come as fast as possible away from the train station not to attract attention to anyone. Because our group leader had to leave the train at the border we didn't have any information what to do or where to go. Ksenia Semenova wrote a SMS asking for information to [SILBA](#) and luckily five minutes later we got a call back by a local supporter whose name I had to forget for his security. Another five minutes later he collected us at the main post office by taxi to bring us to our apartment. After a short update in the flat we decided to rest there for a while and maybe try to do on Sunday the exit polling because the situation there was to sensible and still everybody who tried it was expelled immediately.

At noon we went shopping because we had to serve ourselves. In the supermarket the radio station (of course state owned) told the public that the KGB (Belarus secret service) found out the OSCE observers entering the country arrived are supposed to have already with them prewritten reports with bad judgements about the elections. The observers from commonwealth of independent states (CIS) were asking the OSCE of being fair and not interfering the electoral process!

Back to the apartment four other international observers arrived in the afternoon. Together with our local contact person we all went by a minibus taxi to a meeting point at the other side of the city. The situation was unchanged and we didn't receive any news. Altogether about 15 to 20 persons were there at different tables in or front of a restaurant. It was good to see more faces supporting free elections both local as well as international. We brought some of them to other apartments at another place in the city and then went back to our apartment. Finally Dovile from Lithuania and Alexander von Lingen from Germany (both [SILBA](#)) joined us there.

Knowing the situation now better and also having later the information from [SILBA](#) by SMS not to try to do exit polling for security concerns we decided together in the evening not to do the initially planned exit polling the next day, the main election day.



**19.03.2006**

*During the day it was quiet in Minsk, in the evening a large demonstration took place in the centre of the city (10.000 - 15.000 participants). Huge police forces didn't intervene fortunately.*

So what to do during the day when you should not do anything? [SILBA](#) gave us the advice if we want to go out to the city we could try that but we should show as low profile as possible. It was advised to us not to have a bag or anything else than our passports with us. In contradiction to that I decided for me that I would take my photo camera with me and take the risk. We wanted to be tourists therefore we should try to behave like such. That's the reason why I now can show you pictures from this day. It might be that they are the only one – I actually don't know – from [SILBA](#) from this day or evening from Minsk. As only [LYMEC](#) observer in the country I thought it was my duty to make as lot documentation as possible.

Not to attract attention was the aim so we split up into two groups. Alexander and I decided to visit the "National Museum of Art". In the streets almost nobody could be seen. That was the same for other tourists – no people in the city. On the way to our meeting point with the two others after the museum we passed by the Presidential building and October square. After that we two were stopped by the Militsia (Police) in the park nearby the river. Alexander, a Russian speaker could convince them we were "cultural tourists". Checking the passports was then enough and Militsia wished us a nice stay after we confirmed Belarus is our number one country for holidays.



We changed our meeting point with the two others and stayed then for a while in a restaurant. Later we walked a little bit around passing by the house of opera and visiting the "island of tears" (Afghan war monument). Then we decided due to cold weather conditions to stay again in a restaurant.

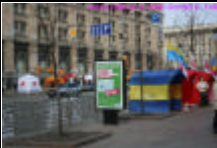

Around 19:30 o'clock we left it and the appearance of the streets was completely different. Crowds of people were in the streets as well huge police forces approached the city centre. I think we'll never forget the sound of the alarm horn of Belarusian Militsia. It seemed to be that many people have been not sure whether they should go to the demonstration at October square or not. There was the mood of fear something could happen with the security forces. But the nearer we came to the central square the more people could be seen and slightly the climate within the crowd improved and fears decreased in the big mass of people.

The centre of interest at the beginning at about eight o'clock was the big TV screen on the side of the place in the direction to the train station. There was state TV broadcasted and people shouted against Lukashenka and his supporters and celebrated their candidates. Milinkievich was brought into connection with the west in showing pictures of George W. Bush and printing dollar notes.

After advertisements started on the TV the people seemed not to know for a while what to do now. Minutes later the crowd suddenly turned and moved to the other side of the square to the "Palace of the Unions" building. We asked the people what was going on but nobody knew. I think this is a strong argument that this protests not have been organised by the west or payed people stood there. It seemed to be that the real population of Minsk stood there. Because we were at the very beginning more or less in the back of the mass we have been on the front after the people were in front of the other building. Mr. Milinkievich and Mr. Kosulin were there as well as other prominent opposition leaders. Proclamations were made and the people seemed not to fear the police any more. Luckily the Militsia was not really interested in the demonstration. They only tried to ensure that the main street stayed in function but nothing else.

At the end of the main event at about 10 pm we talked to some people and the most were surprised about the big international interest of TV stations and media in general. Many of them thought it was a good sign that not everybody supports the president but nobody thought it was enough people to make a revolution.

	<p>Most felt relieved about the passive role of the police during the demonstration. I also found one Belarusian citizen who showed a jacket with "European Liberals" on it. With this experiences we then used a taxi back to our apartment.</p>
	<p><b><u>20.03.2006</u></b>  <i>This Monday seemed to be a normal working day, but in the evening there was another demonstration at October square where all leaders of the Belarusian opposition participated.</i></p> <p>One day after the election everybody of us observers awaited the statement of the OSCE and the reactions of Belarusian media. During the day our group of four again did some sightseeing – this time altogether. We met a choreographer of the state ballet and she showed us the city centre. In the afternoon we had after the impossibility on Sunday the first time the possibility to go into an internet café – directly opposite the presidential building. So we could submit some reports and gather information from the outside. In the internet cafe many young people watched international sites or pages of the opposition. There seemed to be no restrictions in using this mean of expression on this Monday. On Sunday it was told us that there was no connection to the outer world.</p> <p>Walking through the streets gave us not the feeling of a not normal business day. On October square nobody stayed there during the night. We saw only few police in the streets and participated later from 18:30 o'clock at October squares daily demonstration. About five thousand people – around half than the day before – have been there demonstrating peacefully again. Mr. Milinkievich and Mr. Kosulin held speeches to the public as well as many others of the opposition movement like students, union leaders and musicians. This day the sound system and the lightning installation were the best during all the events. People were in a good mood again but at about nine pm the main event was more or less over and Dovile and I went back to the apartment. Ksenia went back by train to Kiev this evening and Mr. Lingen didn't have time to stay very long at the event and used a private hotel that night.</p>
	<p><b><u>21.03.2006</u></b>  <i>This day I used to explore Minsk, finally I visited again the happening of the opposition in the city centre before I started my way back to Kiev.</i></p> <p>Again a walk through the city of Minsk was a must, Dovile, Mr. Lingen and I bought some maps as well as a big poster of president Mr. Lukashenka as insurance for the way back home out of the country. On October Square about 200 to 300 people stayed throughout the night. In the afternoon after a visit of the internet café we went to the "Lycee" of Minsk, a high school for fine arts where we three remaining met a fashion maker.</p> <p>Late afternoon Dovile went back home by train over Vilnius and Mr. Lingen had to meet his friends so I decided to go a last time alone to the demonstration. This time lights have been off and the crowd of about 2000-3000 met in front of the "Palace of Unions". The police that showed up in the streets showed no interest and with this I walked back to the train station and then back to the direction to Kiev.</p>

	<p><u>22.03.2006</u> <i>Returned to Kiev I stayed for a while in the office of <a href="#">SILBA</a>. Before I flew home to Vienna I had a short walk through the election campaigns in the city.</i></p> <p>The border control at about 3:30 am this time was again with no problems for me so I arrived in the morning in Kiev where I was picked up at the train station and came back directly to <a href="#">SILBA</a>s office in Kiev. There I discussed my experiences with some present representatives. Internet didn't work this day so I couldn't send any report out to the world.</p> <p>At noon I went after a short walk through the city of Kiev to the central train station again and then further to the airport by public bus. Via Amsterdam I arrived in the late evening in Vienna.</p>
	<p>During the time in Belarus I reported regularly to <a href="#">LYMEC</a>, <a href="#">JULIS / LSF Austria</a> and my family. Ksenia and Mr. Lingen did the communication with <a href="#">SILBA</a>.</p> <p>At the end I want to ask the Belarusian authorities to obey international rules and to enable their people to live in a free liberal state without fear. Additionally I want to thank everybody who made it possible that this missions could happen.</p> <p>END OF REPORT.</p>