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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1511
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MOSCOW 009349

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/14/00
TAGS: PGOV, RS
SUBJECT: ROUND-UP OF ELECTION MONITOR EXPERIENCES
(PART TWO OF TWO) -- CENTRAL RUSSIA

INTRODUCTION

1. (SBU) FROM MARCH 22-27 MORE THAN 60 OFFICERS FROM
THE EMBASSY AND THE THREE CONSULATES FANNED OUT AROUND
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RUSSIA TO TAKE THE PULSE OF THIS COUNTRY ON THE EVE OF
THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AS WELL AS MONITOR THE
VOTING PROCESS ON ELECTION DAY. WHILE THEIR
EXPERIENCES SAY MUCH ABOUT THE ELECTION, THEY ALSO
PROVIDE OTHER INSIGHTS INTO RUSSIA'S REGIONS. THE
FOLLOWING IS A SAMPLING OF OBSERVATIONS BY EMBASSY
MONITORS WHO SPENT ELECTION DAY IN CENTRAL RUSSIA.

SAMARA

2. (C) IN SAMARA OBLAST THERE WERE NUMEROUS
COMPLAINTS OF MEDIA INACCESSIBILITY TO CANDIDATES

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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OTHER THAN PUTIN DURING THE RUN UP TO THE ELECTIONS.

IN FACT, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] TOLD EMBOFF ON FRIDAY, MARCH 24 THAT DURING THE ENTIRE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN THEIR ORGANIZATIONS HAD BEEN UNABLE TO BUY ADVERTISING FOR THEIR CANDIDATES ON THE NATIONAL TELEVISION CHANNELS OF ORT, RTR, AND NTV. IN ADDITION TO THE LACK OF FAIR ACCESS TO THE NATIONWIDE MEDIA, THERE WAS A GENERAL SENSE OF UNEASE IN SAMARA ONCE IT BECAME CLEAR THAT A RUN-OFF ELECTION WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY. ALTHOUGH NO ONE EMBOFFS SPOKE WITH IN SAMARA ACTUALLY BELIEVED THAT SAMARA GOVERNOR KONSTANTIN TITOV WOULD BE A SERIOUS PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDER IN THIS RACE, MANY HAD HOPED HE WOULD FORCE A SECOND ROUND AND PERHAPS "TEMPER" WHAT THEY EXPECT TO BE A TOUGH STANCE FROM PUTIN ON LAW, ORDER AND PERSONAL FREEDOM IN RUSSIA.

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3. (C) TITOV DID NOT DO AS WELL IN HIS OWN OBLAST AS HE HAD HOPED (BETWEEN 13 AND 48 PERCENT, DEPENDING ON THE RAYON), AND SOME PEOPLE THOUGHT THIS WAS AN INDICATION OF HOW WELL HE WOULD HAVE DONE IN THE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS, HAD TITOV NOT SUBSEQUENTLY RESIGNED, FORCING EARLY GUBERNATORIALELECTIONS (HE IS EXPECTED TO BE A CANDIDATE AND WIN EASILY). PERHAPS IN A FIT OF POST-ELECTORAL DESPAIR, SEVERAL [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] JOKINGLY ASKED EMBOFF FOR INFORMATION ABOUT IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES (OR CANADA). [REDACTED]

TYUMEN

4. (C) EMBASSY MONITORS IN TYUMEN FOUND THAT THE CHAIRPERSONS OF THE PRECINCT ELECTION COMMISSIONS TYPICALLY WERE MIDDLE-AGED. NEVERTHELESS, THERE WERE SEVERAL YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WERE MEMBERS OF MANY OF THE

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COMMISSIONS. THE AREA WHERE EMBOFFS MONITORED WAS
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HOME TO AT LEAST ONE TEKNICUM AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS
OF HIGHER LEARNING, SO THE STUDENT POPULATION OF THE
AREA MAY EXPLAIN THE RELATIVELY LARGE NUMBER OF YOUNG
PEOPLE ON MANY OF THE LOCAL COMMISSIONS. MOST POLLING
PLACES HAD AT LEAST ONE PUTIN OBSERVER AND
OCCASIONALLY THERE WERE OBSERVERS PRESENT FROM "NASH
DOM, NASH URAL," "YABLOKO," OR KPRF.

5. (C) THE PROCESS OF BALLOTING APPEARED WELL-
ORGANIZED IN MOST OF THE TEN POLLING PLACES VISITED BY
EMBOFFS. THERE WERE NO LONG LINES OF VOTERS.
USUALLY, A VOTER COULD CAST A VOTE WITHIN A FEW
MINUTES OF ARRIVING TO VOTE. EMBOFFS OBSERVED QUITE A
FEW INSTANCES OF COUPLES (USUALLY ELDERLY COUPLES)
GOING INTO THE BOOTHS TOGETHER. OFFICIALS QUESTIONED
ABOUT THIS TENDED TO SAY THAT THEY WOULD NOT TRY TO
PREVENT A COUPLE FROM GOING INTO THE BOOTH TOGETHER IF
THAT'S WHAT THEY'VE DECIDED TO DO. PHONING IN UPDATES
ON THE PERCENTAGE OF VOTERS WHO HAD CAST THEIR BALLOTS
WAS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR COMMISSION CHAIRPERSONS. THEY
WERE REQUIRED TO MAKE SEVEN CALLS, ALL ACCORDING TO A
STRICT SCHEDULE.

6. (C) BALLOT COUNTING PROCEEDED EFFICIENTLY.
EMBOFFS THEN FOLLOWED THE CHAIRMAN OF THE LOCAL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 04 MOSCOW 009349

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ELECTION COMMISSION TO THE TERRITORIAL ELECTION
COMMISSION WHERE A NUMBER OF CHAIRPERSONS WERE LINED
UP TO GIVE THEIR RESULTS TO THE TERRITORIAL
COMMISSION. THE TERRITORIAL COMMISSION KNEW THAT
EMBOFFS WANTED TO WITNESS THE PROCESS OF ENTERING THE
VOTE TOTALS INTO THE COMPUTER. THUS, AS A CONCESSION
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TO EMBOFFS, THEY MOVED THE CHAIRMAN EMBOFFS HAD
FOLLOWED TO THE HEAD OF THE LINE.

KAZAN

7. (C) THE ELECTION IN KAZAN COMBINED THE
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WITH ELECTIONS FOR THE LOCAL
DUMA IN SEVERAL CITY DISTRICTS. THERE WAS A HIGH
LEVEL OF INTEREST BY LOCAL OBSERVERS IN THE LOCAL, BUT
NOT THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THE HIGH TURNOUT,
ALMOST EIGHTY PERCENT, SOMEWHAT EXCEEDED PREDICTIONS
BY VARIOUS OBSERVERS WHO HAD PREDICTED 65-70 TURNOUT.
PUTIN RECEIVED 68 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN TATARSTAN, A
FIGURE THAT ROUGHLY CORRESPONDS WITH POLLING MADE
PRIOR TO AND DURING THE ELECTION. PRESIDENT SHAYMIYEV
STRONGLY ENDORSED PUTIN, WHO HAD PAID A HIGH-PROFILE
VISIT TO KAZAN DAYS BEFORE THE ELECTION.
INTERESTINGLY, PUTIN ALSO ENJOYED THE SUPPORT OF LOCAL
LIBERALS, WHO HOPED THAT, ONCE ELECTED, HE WOULD REIGN
IN SHAYMIYEV. THE BALLOT TABULATION AT THE PRECINCT
WHERE EMBOFFS OBSERVED SEEMED TO LACK PRECISION AND
ACCOUNTABILITY.

VORONEZH

8. (C) EMBOFFS MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF 12
POLITICAL PARTIES AND NGOS MARCH 23-25. LOCATED IN
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RUSSIA'S RED BELT, MANY OF VORONEZH'S TWO MILLION VOTERS TRADITIONALLY VOTE FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY. IN THE DECEMBER DUMA ELECTIONS, 29.97 PERCENT VOTED FOR THE KPRF AND 32.66 PERCENT FOR "YEDINSTVO." PARTISAN ELECTION MATERIALS WERE RARE ON THE STREETS OF VORONEZH, BUT A RATHER LARGE POSTER OF PUTIN HUNG FROM A MAJOR INTERSECTION. EMBOFFS OBSERVED A VERY SMALL RALLY FOR TITOV ON MARCH 24 IN THE MAIN SQUARE OF SOME 25-30 PARTICIPANTS.

8. (C) POLITICAL PARTY REPRESENTATIVES PREDICTED TO EMBOFFS THAT TURNOUT WOULD BE GREATER THAN 50 PERCENT. DURING THE DUMA ELECTIONS IN DECEMBER, "AGAINST ALL" CAME IN SECOND PLACE IN SINGLE-MANDATE DISTRICT NUMBER 77 IN VORONEZH. FOR THE MARCH 26 ELECTION, "AGAINST ALL" CAME IN FOURTH WITH THREE PERCENT OF THE VOTE. NONE OF THE PARTY REPRESENTATIVES EMBOFF MET WITH HAD ANY SUBSTANTIVE COMPLAINTS ABOUT VIOLATIONS IN THE CONDUCT OF THE CAMPAIGN OR ABOUT EXPECTED VIOLATIONS ON VOTING DAY. SEVERAL NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT GIVEN THE LACK OF REAL COMPETITION, PARTIES AND ADMINISTRATORS HAD TAKEN MEASURES TO ENSURE THAT NO VIOLATION WOULD TAINT THE RESULTS.

9. (C) IN EMBOFFS' MEETINGS WITH NGO LEADERS, THEY EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF RUSSIA AND ABOUT THE LACK OF AN INDEPENDENT MEDIA DURING THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] NOTED, "THE ONLY INDEPENDENT INFORMATION THAT CAN BE FOUND TODAY IS FROM PUBLICATIONS BY NGO AND BUSINESS COMMUNITIES. THE
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SUBJECT ELECTION COMMISSION (SEC) NOTED THAT THE PRE-ELECTION PROCESS WAS NORMAL AND THE IFES "ELECTIONS-MEDIA" SEMINAR HELD IN VORONEZH WAS HELPFUL. HOWEVER, SEC OFFICIALS SAID THAT JOURNALISTS SEEMED TO FORGET MUCH OF WHAT WAS DISCUSSED AT THE SEMINAR. THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATED BY TELEVISION WAS CONSIDERED TO BE MORE SERIOUS.

10. (C) ON ELECTION DAY, EMBOFFS VISITED SEVERAL POLLING STATIONS IN THE CITY OF VORONEZH AND IN THE MORE RURAL AREAS OF THE OBLAST. EMBOFFS WERE STRUCK BY THE RELATIVE LACK OF PARTY POLLWATCHERS, IN CONTRAST TO THE DECEMBER DUMA ELECTIONS WHEN POLLING STATIONS OFTEN HAD MORE PARTY POLL WATCHERS THAN ELECTION OFFICIALS. WHEN EMBOFFS ASKED WHY THE DIRT

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OF PARTY REPRESENTATIVES AT THE POLLS, PRECINCT ELECTION OFFICIALS OFTEN REMARKED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION SELECTED THE PARTY POLLWATCHERS AND THAT THERE WAS A GENERAL LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR THE ELECTION. THE PUTIN CAMPAIGN OFTEN HAD MORE THAN ONE OBSERVER AT A POLLING STATION AND IN ONE CASE THEY WERE THE ONLY OBSERVERS. THE KPRF ALSO HAD OBSERVERS AT MANY POLLING STATIONS. PUTIN OBSERVERS, MANY OF WHOM WERE OBSERVING FOR THE FIRST TIME, REMARKED TO EMBOFFS THAT THEY HAD ATTENDED TRAINING SEMINARS AND

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WERE BEING PAID USD EIGHT PER DAY. A NUMBER PRECINCT OFFICIALS ALSO STATED THIS WAS THEIR FIRST TIME IN THIS ROLE.

11. (C) EMBOFFS NOTED THAT THE LEVEL OF SECURITY SEEMED TO BE NOTICEABLY INCREASED SINCE DECEMBER'S

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DUMA ELECTION, PERHAPS DUE TO CONCERNS ABOUT CHECHNYA-RELATED TERRORISM. UNLIKE IN DECEMBER WHEN THERE WAS

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USUALLY ONLY ONE UNARMED POLICE OFFICER AT POLLING PLACES, THERE WAS A SIGNIFICANT PRESENCE OF ARMED POLICE AT EACH STATION. REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS ALSO WERE PRESENT AND OBSERVED THE PROCESS CLOSELY.

12. (C) THE TABULATION OF VOTES WENT VERY SMOOTHLY. THE POLLING STATION QUICKLY COUNTED THE BALLOTS WITH AN OVERWHELMING NUMBER OF VOTES GOING TO PUTIN. WHEN THE VOTER REGISTRATION LIST INDICATED THAT 12 BALLOTS WERE DISCOVERED MISSING, THE POLLWATCHERS QUICKLY DISMISSED THIS AS VOTERS TAKING BALLOTS HOME WITH THEM. A RECOUNT WAS CLEARLY IN ORDER BUT THERE WAS LITTLE ENTHUSIASM ON THE PART OF THE POLLWORKERS AND NONE OF THE PARTY POLLWATCHERS PROTESTED. HOWEVER, A REVIEW QUICKLY REVEALED THE ERROR TO BE IN THE PROTOCOL PREPARATION, NOT IN THE COUNT. AT THE TEC THE RESULTS WERE ENTERED INTO THE COMPUTER SYSTEM AS RECORDED IN THE POLLING STATION. THE TEC WAS VERY OPEN, TRANSPARENT, AND WELCOMING TO EMBOFFS. EMBOFFS OBSERVED ALMOST ALL OF THE POLLING STATIONS PRESENTING THEIR INFORMATION TO THE TEC AND FEW EXPERIENCED ANY PROBLEMS. WHEN PROTOCOLS WERE CHANGED, IT APPEARED TO BE DUE TO A MATHEMATICAL ERROR OR ADMINISTRATIVE ERROR IN THE PROTOCOL PREPARATION, AND WAS HANDLED IN AN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT MANNER.

NIZHNIY NOVGOROD

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13. (C) EMBOFFS IN NIZHNIY NOVGOROD MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF ALMOST ALL MAJOR PARTIES AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, INCLUDING PUTIN'S LOCAL CAMPAIGN MANAGER VALERIY BIRYUKOV. INTERESTINGLY, PUTIN'S NIZHNIY CAMPAIGN WAS RUN BY MILITARY VETERANS OF THE AFGHAN AND CHECHEN CONFLICTS (GOVERNOR SKLYAROV, WHO OPENLY ENDORSED PUTIN ON LOCAL TELEVISION, IS DEEPLY INVOLVED IN VETERANS' ACTIVITIES. HE IS WORKING IN THE FEDERATION COUNCIL TO COMBINE THE GOVERNMENT'S SEPARATE SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS OF THE AFGHAN WAR AND CHECHEN CONFLICTS.)

14. (C) ZYUGANOV ARRIVED IN NIZHNIY BY TRAIN IN THE CAR IMMEDIATELY AHEAD OF EMBOFFS. ON THE MORNING OF MARCH 22, HE ADDRESSED A LARGE RALLY OF WORKERS AT THE KRASNAYA SORMA MILITARY FACTORY AND HELD OTHER

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MEETINGS THE NEXT DAY. EMBOFF STOPPED IN ON ZYUGANOV'S MARCH 23 RALLY IN THE JUPITER THEATER, WHICH HAD A PACKED CROWD OF OVER 1000 PENSIONERS. ZYUGANOV'S SPEECH CONTAINED NO SURPRISES. HE COMPLAINED ABOUT THE UNFAIR COVERAGE OF HIS CAMPAIGN ON THE LOCAL STATE TV AFFILIATE (E.G., ON MARCH 20, THE LOCAL RTR AFFILIATE, NTR, BLOCKED OR "COVERED OVER" HIS PAID RTR DOCUMENTARY FILM WITH ANOTHER PROGRAM.) ON THE OTHER HAND, THE LEADING LOCAL TV COMPANY, VOLGA, PROVIDED TIMELY LITERALLY-UP-TO-THE-HOUR COVERAGE OF ZYUGANOV'S VISIT, AND UNPAID NEWS COVERAGE AS WELL AS PAID TIME FOR SPEECHES AND KPRF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE DAYS LEADING UP TO THE

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ELECTION.

15. (C) EMBOFFS WITNESSED NO CLEAR MAJOR VIOLATIONS ON ELECTION DAY. "FAMILY VOTING," HOWEVER, WAS COMMON. PARTY POLLWATCHERS WERE PRESENT AT ALL STATIONS. ONLY ONE POLLING PLACE HAD NO OBSERVERS. AT ONE POLLING STATION EMBOFF OBSERVED A WOMAN CONDUCTING EXIT POLLING FOR A MARKETING FIRM. WHILE SOME VOTERS ANSWERED READILY, OTHER RESENTED THE INTRUSION. THE MILITIA PRESENT RESPONDED TO A CITIZEN COMPLAINT ABOUT THE POLLTAKER. HOWEVER, AFTER PRESENTING A LETTER AUTHORIZING HER TO CONDUCT THE POLL, THE POLICEMEN LEFT HER ALONE.

16. (C) EMBOFF ALSO ACCOMPANIED A MOBILE BALLOT BOX AND OBSERVED VOTING AT HOME BY FIVE INDIVIDUALS. IN ONE CASE, A HUSBAND BERATED HIS WIFE, DEMANDING SHE VOTE FOR A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE. SHE RESPONDED BY SHOUTING, CURSING AND HITTING HIM, BUT VOTED FOR THE CANDIDATE HE INDICATED. IT WAS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THIS HAD BEEN HER DECISION ALL ALONG OR WHETHER SHE WAS RESPONDING TO HER HUSBAND'S REQUESTS. IT WAS CLEAR THIS WAS NOT AN UNUSUAL INTERACTION BETWEEN THE TWO. IN ANOTHER CASE, A WOMAN WHO APPARENTLY HAD SUFFERED A STROKE AND LOST THE USE OF HER ARM LISTENED TO HER

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 04 OF 04 MOSCOW 009349

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GRANDDAUGHTER READ THE LIST OF CANDIDATES AND THEN
 TOLD HER WHICH CANDIDATE SHE PREFERRED. THE
 GRANDDAUGHTER MADE THE ACTUAL MARK ON THE BALLOT.
 WHEN THE OTHER EMBOFF ACCOMPANIED A MOBILE BALLOT BOX,
 HE OBSERVED SEVEN ELDERLY VOTERS AND A YOUNG INVALID
 CAST THEIR VOTES AT HOME. FOUR OF THE EIGHT CHOSE NOT

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 TO HIDE THEIR PREFERENCES AND EACH ONE VOTED FOR
 PUTIN.

17. (U) ON MARCH 27, GOVERNOR SKYLAROV FIRED
 UNFORTUNATE RAYON SUPERVISORS RESPONSIBLE FOR 8 RAYONS
 WHICH VOTED MOST HEAVILY FOR ZYUGANOV. AN NTV REPORT
 SPECULATED THAT THE OBLAST ADMINISTRATION WAS
 DISPLEASED WITH THE RESULTS IN THOSE RAYONS. THE
 FIRING TOOK PLACE ON MARCH AT A MEETING TO DISCUSS THE
 ELECTION RESULTS. IN THIS REPORT, KPRF LEADERS
 CLAIMED THIS PROVIDED AT LEAST INDIRECT EVIDENCE OF
 REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS TO AFFECT THE RESULTS
 OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

 MOSCOW OBLAST/CITY

18. (C) ONE EMBASSY MONITOR WHO COVERED THE TOWNS OF
 OREKHOVO-ZUYEVO, ELECTROGORSK, NOGENSK, PAVLOVSKIY
 POSAD, AND KALININGRAD IN MOSCOW OBLAST NOTED NO MAJOR

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ELECTORAL VIOLATIONS. THERE ALSO WERE FEW PARTY POLLWATCHERS PRESENT, AND WHEN THERE WERE, THEY WERE USUALLY FROM THE KPRF. WHEN EMBOFF ARRIVED AT THE FIRST TOWN, OREKHOVO-ZUYEVO, SHE WAS STOPPED BY THE POLICE WHO WERE CURIOUS ABOUT WHO SHE WAS AND WHAT SHE WAS DOING. THE POLICE LOOKED AT EMBOFF'S DOCUMENTATION AND WROTE DOWN THE INFORMATION. THE POLICE THEN ASKED WHAT WAS EMBOFFS' NEXT STOP, TO WHICH SHE REPLIED SHE DID NOT KNOW. EMBOFF RANDOMLY CHOSE A SECOND SITE, BUT LO AND BEHOLD, ONE OF THE

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OFFICERS AT THE FIRST SITE SHOWED UP THERE.

19. (C) IN PAVLOVSKIY POSAD, ONE PRECINCT CHAIRMAN REFUSED TO ANSWER EMBOFF'S QUESTIONS. EMBOFF THEN PROMPTLY WENT TO THE TEC, WHO CALLED THE PRECINCT CHAIRMAN TO ASSURE HER IT WAS OK FOR EMBOFF TO MONITOR. WHEN EMBOFF RETURNED, THE PRECINCT CHAIRMAN SAID THAT SHE HAD BEEN NERVOUS ABOUT HAVING A FOREIGNER PRESENT. IT SEEMED THAT SHE HAD NEVER MET A FOREIGNER BEFORE.

20. (C) WHILE "FAMILY VOTING" IS QUITE COMMON, AN EMBOFF WHO OBSERVED IN THE MOSCOW OBLAST TOWN OF VOLOKOLOMSK FOUND A PRECINCT THAT SEEMED TO ALLOW ANYONE TO ACCOMPANY OTHERS INTO THE VOTING BOOTH. ONE VOTER CAME IN WITH SOMEONE WEARING AN LDPR ARMBAND, WHO LATER WAS ALLOWED TO ACCOMPANY THAT VOTER INTO THE BOOTH. IN ADDITION, A FELLOW MARKED A BALLOT FOR HIS DRUNKEN FRIEND. AT ANOTHER VOLOKOLOMSK PRECINCT, ONE PERSON DECLINED A BALLOT WHEN HE DISCOVERED HE WAS NOT ON THE VOTING LIST, EVEN THOUGH THE PRECINCT CHAIRMAN OFFERED TO REGISTER HIM.

21. (C) IN A MOSCOW CITY PRECINCT, ONE EMBOFF OBSERVED PEOPLE VOTING OUT IN THE OPEN ON A TABLE. SOME RAN THEIR FINGERS DOWN THE PAPER LOOKING FOR "PUTIN" AND MARKED IT. OTHERS WITH RELISH MARKED "AGAINST ALL" RIGHT AWAY. OTHERS STILL READ THE BALLOTS FOR A LONG TIME AS IF IT WAS THE FIRST THEY HAD EVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT OR AS IF THEY WERE WONDERING WHO ALL THOSE "OTHER GUYS" WERE. A LOT OF VOTERS RED

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THE POSTER LISTING THE CANDIDATES, AFTER THEY VOTED. WHEN THIS EMBOFF ACCOMPANIED A PRECINCT'S MOBILE BALLOT BOX, SHE FOUND THAT FOUR OF THE SIX ELDERLY

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MENTIONED WHO THEY WERE VOTING FOR AND IT WAS PUTIN.
KPRF OBSERVERS ALSO ASKED EMBOFF IF THEY COULD OBSERVE
A U.S. ELECTION.
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