

Question N1

If the frame-envelope fully guaranteed the secrecy of the vote, as stated by the CEC, why was there an emphasis during the pre-election period on the thickness of the ballot paper to ensure that no color mark would show through on the back side?

CEC Answer:

The use of a special frame-envelope in the voting process practically ensured complete secrecy of the vote. The frame-envelope's size and design, when the ballot is properly placed within it, fully cover all election subjects on the ballot as well as the choice expressed by the voter. The frame-envelope thus guarantees secrecy from the voting booth to the vote counting machine.

The CEC emphasized the paper thickness as an additional measure to maintain compliance with the threshold parameters of the vote counting machine, selecting the maximum paper thickness allowed. The vendor recommended a paper weight of 162 grams with a $\pm 20\%$ variation. Taking extra security, the CEC ordered paper with a thickness exceeding the recommendation, specifically 190 grams.

Question N2

If the marker trace on the other side of the paper posed no problem and the frame-envelope guaranteed secrecy, what mechanism was in place to ensure that the voter's choice would not be revealed if the ballot was returned by the machine?

CEC Answer:

First of all, the primary safeguard mechanism was the voter's correct placement of the ballot in the electronic vote counting machine. Additionally, considering the recommendations of local NGOs, a special instruction was developed requiring voters to first place the ballot in the frame-envelope facing downward and then inserting it into the voting machine. In addition, any marker trace, if present, would not allow for identification of the voter's expressed choice, as the back of the ballot did/does not display election subject data or ordinal numbers.

Question N3

According to the CEC, if the ballot is properly placed, it is impossible for the secrecy of the vote to be breached. If secrecy was nevertheless compromised, it means the voter failed to properly place the ballot. In this case, what instructions were breached during the voting procedure?

CEC Answer:

Proper placement implies that the voter places the ballot in the special frame-envelope in such a way that the frame-envelope fully covers the election subjects' data and ordinal numbers on the ballot. The frame-envelope should be closely aligned with the vote counting machine and should not be removed until the machine confirms receipt of the ballot.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the marker trace on the back of the ballot is a technical issue and cannot be considered as a breach of the vote secrecy.

Question N4

The marker trace on the back of the ballot was also visible when the vote counting machine supervisors would take the ballot from voters and insert it into the machine themselves. Were the vote counting machine supervisors instructed on how to correctly insert the ballot?

CEC Answer:

Commission members received the relevant training. According to the election legislation, this function is performed by the deputy chairperson of the precinct election commission or, in case of necessity, by other members of the commission based on an order of a chairperson or deputy. According to procedure, the voter places the ballot in the vote counting machine themselves. If the voter is unable to do so, the machine supervisor assists them in accordance with instructions.

Question N5

Your pre-election promise regarding the increased thickness of the ballot paper implied that there would be paper thick enough to prevent marker traces from showing through on the back side. Why was this not achieved?

CEC Answer:

As I mentioned above, when choosing the ballot paper, the CEC was guided by the vendor company's recommendation, and the paper parameters had to fit the cut of the vote-counting machine. With this in mind, a thicker paper was selected than the paper used in all previous pilots or studies.