

Press Release

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Elections in Azerbaijan: some improvement, but much still to do to raise the level of trust and respect between central and local administration

Strasbourg, 09.10.2006 - At the invitation of the Azerbaijan authorities, a delegation of the Congress of local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe, observed the partial repeat of municipal elections held on 6th October 2006.

"We noted a general technical improvement in the organization of the elections process, in line with European standards, but unfortunately we also observed serious irregularities for example mismatch between signatures registered on the voting list and votes found in the ballot box, family voting, multiple similar signatures on the voters lists, over-zealous assistance within in the polling booth declared Ludmila Sfirloaga, head of the delegation. And - she added- although the election day was calm and voting took place inside polling centres in an orderly manner, there are other important commitments still to fulfill"

The local democracy in the Republic of Azerbaijan should be based more on real powers and resources for local authorities, in the full respect of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government signed and ratified in 2002, and based on clear political commitment.

"In fact the lack of any dynamic electoral campaign, the decision of the main opposition parties not to participate in the elections and the still relatively weak participation in the vote seems to demonstrate that meaningful local democracy is not yet one of the political priorities in the Republic of Azerbaijan" she declared.

As in 2004, the Congress delegation again reiterates the need to facilitate the full recognition of the powers and the responsibilities of the local authorities. The setting up of specific actions and programs for information and training of all involved people must be the field where the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Congress of the Council of Europe should come together.

With progressive and positive commitment by the Government and the Congress the quality of life for all the people will improve.

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 46 member states.

Composition of the delegation

Members of the Congress

- **Mrs Ludmila Sfirloaga, Congress**, Vice-President of the Congress, Councillor, Prahova County Council (Romania, SOC) – **Head of delegation**
- **Ms Brith Fäldt**, Councillor, Pitea, Member of the Congress (Sweden, SOC)
- **Mr Mihkel Juhkami**, Chair, Rakvere City Council, Member of the Congress
- **Mr David Lloyd-Williams**, Councilor, North-Yorkshire County, Member of the Congress (UK, ILDG)
- **Mrs Véronique Moreira**, Regional Councillor of Rhône Alpes, Member of the Congress (France, SOC)
- **Mr Paolo Rondelli**, Municipal Councillor of San Marino, Member of the Congress (San Marino, SOC)

Secretariat of the Congress

- **Ms Antonella Cagnolati**, Deputy Chief Executive of the Congress
- **Ms Caroline Martin**, Congress Secretariat
- **Ms Gönül Kocak**, Congress Secretariat

Mr Denis Bribosia, Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General