

# Press Release

## Parliamentary Assembly Communication Unit

Ref: 645a06

Tel: +33 3 88 41 31 93

Fax: +33 3 90 21 41 34

pace.com@coe.int

internet: www.coe.int/press



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### Constitutional referendum conducted, in general, with due respect for Serbia's Council of Europe commitments

Belgrade, 30.10.2006 – The Constitutional Referendum held in the Republic of Serbia on 28 and 29 October 2006 was, in general, conducted with due respect for Serbia's democratic commitments to the Council of Europe, concluded a delegation of observers from the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE).

The delegation, headed by Alexander Fomenko (Russia, UEL), lauded the peaceful and orderly conduct of the vote. The atmosphere was clearly conducive to a democratic expression of the will of the electorate. The delegation further noted the broad cross-party and cross-community agreement on the need for a new Constitution, despite calls for a boycott from some quarters. Media, both print and electronic, offered a variety of opinions, allowing the people of Serbia to take a well thought-out decision.

However, a politically-motivated decision to hold an early vote on the Constitution did not allow the political parties to conduct a proper awareness-raising campaign, enabling substantive public debate. By the same token, there was not enough training for electoral officials, who were not used to administering a vote spread over two days. Other concerns included inadequate seals on the ballot boxes, polling booths that potentially compromised the secrecy of the vote, and the quality of the voter lists.

The delegation split into teams which observed in and around Belgrade, as well as Nis, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Vršac and Vranje. It could not observe the vote in Kosovo, as UNMIK had announced it would not support the holding of a referendum in this UN-administered territory.

Given the short time before the adoption of the new Constitution by the Serbian Parliament and the Referendum, the Council of Europe has not yet been able to evaluate its contents, but will do so shortly.

The delegation will produce a detailed report on this observation, including detailed recommendations, which will be presented to the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly on 17 November 2006.

The delegation was in Serbia at the invitation of the Republican Electoral Committee and had meetings with the Speaker of Parliament Predrag Marković, the Secretary of the Republican Electoral Commission Marko Danilovic, party representatives, the media and civil society.

#### Contacts:

Vladimir Dronov, PACE Secretariat, mobile +33 (0)6 63 49 37 92

Angus Macdonald, PACE Communication Unit, mobile +33 (0)6 30 49 68 20

Aleksandra Tekijaski, Council of Europe Belgrade Office, mobile +381 (0)6 45 02 97 13

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).