

Press Release

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Serbia at the crossroads, according to PACE pre-election delegation

46 members

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Belgrade, 20.12.06 – The 21 January 2007 parliamentary elections in Serbia will be an important test of Serbia's commitment to further democratisation and continued European integration, concluded a pre-election delegation¹ of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

The delegation noted the highly competitive nature of the forthcoming vote, with ten election lists registered so far (several more are expected), offering a solid choice for the electorate. It took note of an amended electoral legislation allowing diaspora voting and of new administrative measures facilitating the representation of ethnic minorities in the future Parliament. It welcomed new regulations ensuring a better gender balance in politics.

The delegation was pleased with an improved media environment, with markedly less interference by the authorities. It was, however, aware of new pressures on the journalistic profession, mainly due to the use of economic levers by vested interests.

The delegation was concerned by the rise of radical sentiments in the Serbian electorate, not least against the backdrop of Serbia's forthcoming Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Serbia will assume the six-month rotating Chairmanship in May 2007.

The delegation was in Serbia from 18 to 21 December 2006 at the invitation of the Secretary of the Republican Electoral Commission of Serbia. It was received by the Speaker of the Parliament and the President of the Supreme Court. The purpose was to assess the political situation in the country in the run-up to the 21 January 2007 elections. Its working programme included meetings with representatives of political parties, high-level government officials, media representatives and members of civil society.

In its exchanges with Serbian official representatives, the delegation evoked the specific conclusion, criticisms and recommendations in the report by the PACE delegation that observed the Serbian constitutional referendum on 28 and 29 October 2006, such as inadequate ballot-box sealing and out-of-date lists. It also called for better training for electoral officials. The delegation received assurances that corrective action will be taken ahead of the 21 January vote to preclude any repetition of shortcomings detected during the referendum and the previous elections of 2003.

A 20-member team of observers from the Parliamentary Assembly will observe the 21 January election in around a dozen localities, possibly including Kosovo.

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1. Tadeusz Iwinski (Poland, SOC), Head of Delegation, Corien Joncker (Netherlands, EPP/CD), Helena Bargholtz (Sweden, ALDE).

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).