

# Press Release

## Parliamentary Assembly Communication Unit

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### **Russian Presidential election: for an election to be good it takes a good process, not just a good election day**

Strasbourg, 03.03.2008 – The result of the Presidential elections held on 2 March 2008 in the Russian Federation is a reflection of the will of an electorate whose democratic potential was, unfortunately, not tapped, concluded a 22-member delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) headed by Andreas Gross (Switzerland, SOC).

In the elections, which had more the character of a plebiscite on the last eight years in this country, the people of Russia voted for the stability and continuity associated with the incumbent President and the candidate promoted by him. The President-elect will have a solid mandate given to him by the majority of Russians.

At the same time, this election repeated most of the flaws revealed during the Duma elections of December 2007. They were highlighted as failings by the PACE pre-electoral mission that was in Russia on 7 and 8 February 2008. None of the concerns of the pre-electoral mission were dealt with ahead of the 2 March vote. Candidate registration concerns could not have been accommodated, putting into question the degree of how free the election was. Equal access of the candidates to the media and the public sphere in general has not improved, putting into question the fairness of the election.

The delegation had the impression that the voting was well administered, although it observed the same flaws as seen during the Duma elections. The parliamentarians stressed that for an election to be good, it takes a good process, not just a good election day.

Nonetheless, the delegation felt that even if those concerns had been addressed, the outcome of the vote – amounting, in effect, to a vote of confidence in the incumbent President – would have been the same.

The PACE delegation deplored the absence in the field of its traditional election observation partners, notably long-term observers from the OSCE/ODIHR. The quality of election observation depends, to a significant extent, on the information – not least the media monitoring analysis – provided by ODIHR. However, in this particular case, the delegation was confident that it was able to complete its task efficiently and credibly. The delegation calls on the President-elect, as one of his first acts, to have sufficient confidence in his own country and its democracy to declare his intention to welcome in future a much larger representation of official observers over a longer period of time.

The delegation appreciated the willingness of its Duma colleagues and the Central Election Commission to re-evaluate existing electoral legislation in the light of the 2007 Duma and 2008 Presidential elections. As already proposed in the 2004 and 2007 election observation reports, the delegation believes that the creation of a public and independent television service would serve the cause of democracy. It has to be decided how, in future, people holding high office should behave when they run for new office.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: Lluís Maria de Puig (Spain, SOC) ; Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

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

The delegation supports the proposal of the Central Election Commission Chair that, in future, television debates should be made attractive to the public, the candidates and the broadcasters in such a way that no candidate would wish to opt out.

Candidate registration procedures should be simplified to be more inclusive and less cumbersome for independent candidates. The legislation on campaign funding should also be improved to increase the transparency of the process.

The delegation was in Moscow from 26 February to 3 March 2008 at the invitation of the Chairman of the State Duma and observed the election in Moscow, St Petersburg and Yaroslavl. It met with three of the Presidential candidates and the campaign manager of Mr Medvedev.

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