

Press Release

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Local and provincial elections largely in line with international standards but Serbia needs identifiable local leadership

Belgrade, 12.05.2008 – The provincial elections in Vojvodina and the local elections throughout Serbia, held on 11 May, were in line with international election standards, according to the observers of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. "Election Day was generally marked by a calm voting environment and the absence of significant irregularities, but people need to know for which candidate they are actually voting" said Paolo Rondelli (Soc, San Marino), the Head of the Congress observation team.

The current Law on Local Elections gives complete discretion for the political party or group to attribute the obtained local assembly mandates to any candidate on the electoral list and power to decide on the resignation of a Councillor. At present the voters cannot know for whom they are voting and it is not certain that the head of the electoral list is the group's candidate for the post as Mayor.

The delegation, which included Members of the European Union's Committee of the Regions, was satisfied that political parties, including minority groups, had fair access to media. Nevertheless, the delegation regretted that the electoral campaign culminated in some instances of threats and slander, which amounted to a step backwards in political campaigning in Serbia. The predominant focus of the electoral campaign on European Union and Kosovo prevented political parties from devoting due attention to local government issues.

On polling day, the secrecy of the vote was compromised by inadequate voting booths and too many small and unsuitable polling stations that made efficient management of the voting difficult, particularly at peak times.

The Congress observers concluded that the Law on Local Elections should be improved, to be in line with the European Charter for Local Self-Government. The delegation also reiterated that parliamentary elections should be organised separately from local and provincial elections.

The Congress delegation, including three Members of the European Union's Committee of the Regions, deployed 28 observers in 12 Serbian locations on election day (Belgrade, Kragujevac, Leskovac, Ložnica, Nis, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Presevo, Senta, Sombor, Sremska Mitrovica, Vršac).

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The Congress has two chambers, the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions. It brings together 318 full and 318 substitute members representing more than 200 000 European territorial communities. President of the Congress Halvdan Skard (Norway, SOC), President of the Chamber of Regions: Yavuz Milden (EPP/CD, Turkey), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities : Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/CD). Political Groups : Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).

Members of the delegation:

- Mr Paolo Rondelli, Congress (San Marino, SOC) – Head of delegation
- Ms Susan Bolam, Congress (United Kingdom, EPP/CD) - Rapporteur
- Mr Joseph Borg, Congress (Malta, EPP/CD)
- Mr William Carey, Congress (Ireland, EPP/CD)
- Mr Joe Conway, Congress (Ireland, ILDG)
- Mr Pierre Corneloup, Congress (France, EPP/CD)
- Ms Pauline Dee, Congress (United Kingdom, ILDG)
- Mr Mihkel Juhkami, Congress (Estonia, EPP/CD)
- Mr Ott Kasuri, Congress (Estonia, ILDG)
- Mr Hannu Kemppainen, Congress (Finland, ILDG)
- Mr Mehboob Khan, Congress (United Kingdom, SOC)
- Mr Jüri Landberg, Congress (Estonia, ILDG)
- Mr David Lloyd-Williams, Congress (United Kingdom, ILDG)
- Mr Giorgi Masalkini, Congress (Georgia, ILDG)
- Mr Nigel Mermagen, Congress (United Kingdom, ILDG)
- Mrs Véronique Moreira, Congress (France, NR)
- Michael Neureiter, Congress (Austria)
- Mr Fabio Pellegrini, Congress (Italy, SOC)
- Ms Dominique Ronga, Congress (France, SOC)
- Mr Joachim Smyla, Congress (Poland, EPP/CD)
- Mr Georg Spartanski, Congress (Bulgaria, EPP/CD)
- Mr Väino Hallikmägi, CoR (Estonia, ALDE)
- Ms Ursula Männle, CoR (Germany, EPP)
- Mr Patrick Charles Mc Gowan, CoR (Ireland, UEN-EA)

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