

# Press Release

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## Free local and regional elections in Ukraine, though overshadowed by parliamentary voting

Kyiv, 27.03.2006 – The elections held on Sunday 26 March in Ukraine are, no doubt, the most free and fair elections of the lower tiers of Government held in the country since independence, according to the observers of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The Congress observers pointed out the high voter turnout, the peaceful and calm environment, the highly improved conduct of the scrutiny and the absence of significant irregularities on Election Day. They reported that, in the polling stations they monitored, no violations regarding the legal procedures concerning voters' lists and the use of mobile voting could be found.

The Congress observers emphasized that the predominant focus of the electoral campaign on parliamentary elections had prevented political parties devoting the attention due to local and regional elections.

Referring to the many operational problems in polling stations, the Congress observers noted that the organisation of the local and regional elections on the same day as parliamentary elections had regrettably undermined the progress made to conduct elections in an efficient manner. Overcrowding was prevalent in the vast majority of polling stations mainly due to the length of the ballot papers, the inconsistency in the numbers assigned to political parties/candidates on the ballot papers, the complex burden of delivering ballot papers to the voters and, in some cases, the inadequacy of polling stations. The overcrowding often gave rise to voting outside the voting booths and to family voting, thus compromising the secrecy of the vote. Elderly persons faced special problems in this regard. Election commission members were not always fully aware of the procedures, particularly at the closing of polling stations. The use of the same boxes for all ballot papers unnecessarily added to the time for the counting process.

The Congress observers reiterated the proposal that local and regional elections be organised separately from parliamentary elections. They underlined the need to provide all electoral commission members with professional, timely and adequate training.

Finally, the Congress underlined the need to remove the recent amendment to the Law on the status of members of local councils, granting them a large immunity against criminal and administrative investigations, which represents a clear threat to local democracy and seriously compromises the trust of citizens in local self-government bodies.

*The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe deployed 20 observers in eight Ukrainian regions on election day (Kiev, Chernigov, Crimea, Lviv, Dnepropetrovsk, Charkiv, Odessa and Chernivsti).*

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## **Composition of the Congress delegation**

### **Socialist group: 5 members**

Sean O'Brien (Ireland, L)  
 Fabio Pellegrini (Italy, L)  
 Ludmila Sfirloaga (Romania, R)  
 Anatoly Saltykov (Russian Federation, R)  
 Alain Chénard (France)

### **EPP/CD group: 7 members**

Pascal Mangin (France, L)  
 Giorgi Mosidze (Georgia, R)  
 Ian Micallef (Malta, L)  
 Marja Van der Tas (Netherlands, L)  
 Omur Aybar (Turkey, R)  
 Susan Bolam (United Kingdom, R)  
 Wim Van Gelder (Netherlands, R)

### **Liberal group ILDG: 2 members**

Giuseppe Magni (Italy, L)  
 David Lloyd-Williams (United Kingdom, R)

### **Not Registered : 3 members**

Michael Neureiter (Austria, R)  
 Zeljko Ozegovic (Serbia and Montenegro, L)

### **Congress Secretariat :**

Antonella Cagnolati  
 Deputy Chief Executive of the Congress / Directrice exécutive adjointe du Congrès

Pilar Morales  
 Head of the Co-ordination and Management Division, Co-ordination of election observation / Chef de la Division de Coordination et Management, Coordination de l'observation des élections

Irina Blonina  
 Institutional Committee of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress /  
 Commission institutionnelle de la Chambre des Régions du Congrès

*The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe observed the parliamentary elections of 26 March as part of the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) consisting of the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe, the OSCE and NATO, the European Parliament and the OSCE/ODHIR.*