



T +33(0)390214895

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congress.web@coe.int

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Local vote in Georgia: Council of Europe Congress calls for zero-tolerance strategy towards electoral violence before runoffs

Tbilisi, 16 June 2014. - "We are all glad that yesterday's elections - despite the reports we have received about local incidents and individual irregularities - were carried out in an overall calm and peaceful manner. After a controversial campaign in a heated atmosphere including harsh rhetoric and violent actions, this was not to be taken for granted" stated Jos Wienen (Netherlands, EPP/CCE), Head of the Congress delegation to observe local elections in Georgia, at a press conference in Tbilisi today.

On 15 June, eleven Congress observation teams were deployed to different regions of Georgia and visited more than 150 polling stations. The delegation comprised 22 members from 15 European countries representing the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the EU Committee of the Regions.

At today's press conference to present preliminary conclusions, Mr Wienen pointed to further progress achieved in respect of the technical side of polling in Georgia and congratulated the Central Election Commission for its professional performance under difficult circumstances. He also mentioned improvements with regard to media freedom, access of the political contestants to the media and positive echoes about openness of the electorate and absence of pressure on voters.

"However, the electoral legislation has to be further improved. For example, the current system still favours the incumbent forces and is not conducive to smaller parties and independent candidates, in particular regarding the current composition of electoral commissions. We also believe that the counting procedures have to be reviewed", Mr Wienen added.

"Moreover, we received reports about candidates of opposition parties who withdrew from the proportional party lists, allegedly because of pressure exerted on them. We therefore urge the Georgian authorities to ensure due and transparent follow-up and legal proceedings. This holds also true for cases of violence which happened prior to these elections and yesterday", he underlined.

"Therefore, with regard to the runoffs which are to be expected in the coming weeks, a zero-tolerance policy has to be adopted towards electoral violence and degrading or hateful discourse. I urge all political actors, both from the government and the opposition, to contribute to this strategy", the Head of the Congress delegation concluded.

[Preliminary conclusions](#)
[Press release issued on 11 June 2014](#)

Contact on the spot

Renate Zikmund, Head of the Congress Division of Local and Regional Election Observation

Tel: + 33 659 786 455 – renate.zikmund@coe.int

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: Herwig Van Staa (Austria, EPP/DC), President of the Chamber of Regions: Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, IDLG), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC)

Political Groups: Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG), European Conservatives & Reformists Group (ECR)