



Georgian local elections mark evident progress, but significant shortcomings remain to be addressed

Tbilisi, 31.05.2010 – Yesterday's municipal elections in Georgia marked evident progress towards meeting international standards, but significant shortcomings remain to be addressed, international observers from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities concluded in a statement released today.

The election administration organized these elections in a transparent, inclusive and professional manner, but systemic irregularities were observed on election day in some regions, including several cases of ballot box stuffing and procedural violations during the vote count. The observers also noted deficiencies in the legal framework and its implementation, and characterized the campaign environment as an uneven playing field favouring contestants from the incumbent party. The Georgian public broadcaster provided overall balanced coverage.

The authorities made efforts to pro-actively address problems, including improving the quality of the voter lists. Nevertheless, the low level of public confidence in the election process persisted. The observers said further efforts in resolutely tackling recurring misconduct are required in order to consolidate the progress achieved and enhance public trust before the next national elections.

"These elections were marked by clear improvements and efforts by the authorities to address problems occurring during the process. It is now time to fix the remaining shortcomings and take effective steps to prevent electoral malpractices before the next elections at the national level," said Ambassador Audrey Glover, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term Election Observation Mission.

"The municipal councils, the mayors and – more specifically – the directly elected Mayor of Tbilisi have now to solve the social and economic problems of the country which are serious. From the perspective of locally elected representatives, responsible regional stability policies are key in this respect. The Congress is ready to accompany and assist Georgia in this direction, in particular with regard to the development of local democracy and citizens' participation," said Günther Krug, Head of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities delegation.

"Strong democracy is built from local level upwards so we were particularly pleased to see the high level of engagement and interest of young people, women and minorities in these elections. We hope that, as shortcomings are addressed and confidence develops, many of them will move from involvement in the process to be the candidates of the future," said Sharon Taylor, speaker of the members of the European Union's Committee of the Regions in the Congress delegation.

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