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Congress considers pre-term local elections in Ukraine as important step towards decentralization

Kyiv, 26 May 2014. - A 19 member delegation from the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities representing 13 European countries observed the pre-term local elections on Sunday in Ukraine which were held simultaneously with the presidential vote. At a press conference in Kyiv, Head of the delegation Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC) presented the preliminary conclusions together with Arnoldas Abramavicius (Lithuania, EPP), the spokesperson on this delegation for the EU Committee of the Regions.

All in all, not least due to the security situation in the south-eastern part of Ukraine, early local elections were observed in three out of six regional centres, 11 towns of regional and district subordination and - particularly - in the capital city of Kyiv. Already during the preparatory meetings of the Congress delegation with representatives of the state authorities, the diplomatic corps and civil society, the volatile situation was at the centre of discussions as well as the recently amended Law on Local Elections which addressed shortcomings of the last local vote held in 2010.

"We welcome that the Ukrainian authorities took into consideration recommendations made by the Congress in this respect, in particular with regard to amendments to the voters' list, decisions of the election commissions and the rights of domestic election observers", said Gudrun Mosler-Törnström. She added that the direct election of the Mayor of Kyiv, as urged by the Congress, was crucial for Ukraine.

However, said Mosler-Törnström, there was room for improvement with regard to the practical side of Election Day, notably the counting procedures:

"In many polling stations there were voters queuing already in the morning, facing a very long wait for their ballots. The situation was particularly difficult in Kyiv where four ballots were to be completed - for the presidential and the mayoral vote as well as the political parties' lists and the majoritarian candidates for the city council. The fact that polling stations were systematically under-staffed increased the waiting time throughout the day."

Another shortcoming concerning this vote was the lack of information materials about the candidates and programmes of the candidates for mayor and municipal councils, specifically in Kyiv and other big cities. "These local elections were clearly overshadowed by the presidential vote. This is why the Congress recommends the Ukrainian authorities to hold the next general local elections in 2015 without any other vote on the same day", said Mosler-Törnström.

And she concluded: "Despite the fragile political environment, yesterday's vote at the local level was a positive test and an important step towards decentralisation in Ukraine. We welcome in particular that pressure on voters and threatening them was not an issue as in previous elections. The same seems to be true for the

misuse of administrative resources. We encourage the Ukrainian authorities to continue in this way and make the next general local elections a full success."

Preliminary conclusions

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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: 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)