

THE CONGRESS
OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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REPORT
ON THE LOCAL BY-ELECTIONS IN MOLDOVA
27 November and 11 December 2005

Rapporteur: David Lloyd-Williams (UK, L, ILDG)

Document adopted
by the Bureau of the Congress on 10 February 2006

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1 Introduction

At the invitation of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Moldova, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe observed the elections held on 27 November 2005 to elect the mayors of Chisinau and 13 other municipalities of Moldova, as well as the "repeat" elections held on 11 December.

In conformity with the Congress Bureau's decision, the delegation for the initial elections was composed of David Lloyd-Williams, UK (ILDG), Ömür Aybar, Turkey (EPP), Fabio Pellegrini, Italy (SOC) and Viatcheslav Rogov, Russian Federation (ILDG), accompanied by Jean-Philippe Bozouls and Tim Lisney from the Congress Secretariat. David Lloyd-Williams and Ömür Aybar returned to Chisinau to observe the "repeat" elections of 11 December. The delegation's observation work focused on Chisinau, in view of the importance of the capital city (in terms of population, size and economic and political role) and of the political stakes involved in the election of its mayor.

Both during the preparation of its visit and in the field, the Congress delegation received valuable assistance from the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in Moldova.

On 25 and 26 November, the delegation met with Eugeniu Stirbu, the newly appointed president of the Central Electoral Commission, seven of the eight candidates, representatives of the various parliamentary parties, the media, the local OSCE mission and local NGOs. The programme for these meetings is given in Appendix I. On polling day, the delegation divided into three teams. The teams were able to visit 50 polling stations on 27 November. The following day, the delegation held a press conference, presided by the head of delegation, and issued a press release (Appendix III), expressing its concern at the lack of public interest generated by the campaign.

The results of the 27 November elections were declared invalid, since the 22.3% turnout fell well short of the 33% turnout required by Article 136 of the electoral code. Therefore, in accordance with the electoral code, "repeat" elections were organised two weeks later.

During this second visit, the delegation met with Mihail Sidorov, Deputy Chairman of the Legal Commission for Appointments and Immunities of the Parliament, three of the candidates for the post of Mayor of Chisinau and a representative of the Infotag news agency. The programme of this visit is given in Appendix II. The delegation deployed two observation teams, which were able to visit some 40 polling stations on the day of the poll.

The turnout at the "repeat" elections was slightly higher, at 22.6%, but not high enough for the election results to be valid. The following day, the delegation held another press conference and issued a second press release (Appendix IV), urging the Government, Parliament and the Central Electoral Commission to urgently take measures in order to break the electoral deadlock.

Monitoring and election observation by the Congress in Moldova

The Republic of Moldova joined the Council of Europe in 1995, ratifying the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1997. It entered into force on 1 February 1998. The situation of local and regional democracy in Moldova has been the object of several information and monitoring reports prepared by the Congress, both before and after the country joined the Organisation. The latest monitoring report

on local democracy in Moldova was adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 9 November 2005¹.

The Congress has observed several elections in Moldova, including general local elections in 1995², local and regional elections in 1999³, general local and regional elections in 2003⁴, local elections in Gagauzia in August 1999⁵, and regional elections held in Gagauzia in 2002⁶ and 2003⁷.

Background to the elections

The current election for General Mayor of Chisinau was made necessary by the resignation of the former General Mayor Mr Urechean in April 2005. Mr Urechean, Leader of the Electoral Bloc "Democratic Moldova", was elected to the Moldovan Parliament in the parliamentary elections of March 2005. Under the country's constitution, Members of Parliament are not allowed to engage in any other gainful activity.

On 4 May, the Central Electoral Commission decided, in keeping with Article 122 of the Electoral Code, to hold early by-elections to elect the mayors of Chisinau and 13 other localities, to be elected for a two-year period until the next general local elections in 2007.

These elections were held and observed by the Congress on 10 and 24 July. On each occasion, turnout fell short of the 33% required and the election results were declared invalid. In the light of this, on 23 September, the Central Electoral Commission decided to hold fresh elections on 27 November. The November election results were declared invalid for the same reason and "repeat" elections were held on 11 December.

The elections are governed by the Moldovan Electoral Code, adopted in 1997 and subsequently amended several times. In June 2004, the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the OSCE/ODIHR adopted a joint opinion on this electoral code. The code was again amended on 22 July 2005⁸. The Venice Commission is currently preparing another opinion on the code, in the light of the experience of the 2005 elections.

2 The Campaign

Candidates

Eight candidates were finally registered for this campaign, as follows:

Oleg Cernei	Ecologist Party
Dorin Chirtoaca	Liberal Party
Valentin Krilov	Patria-Rodina-Ravnopravie
Eduard Musuc	Social Democrat Party
Olga Nicolenco	Social Liberal Party
Mircea Rusu	Alliance "Moldova Noastra"
Gheorghe Sima	Labor Union Patria - Rodina
Vasile Ursu	Independent Candidate

1 See Recommendation 179 (2005) and the Explanatory memorandum, CPL(12)9 Part II

2 Report CG/CP (1) 48

3 Report CG/Bur (6) 16

4 Report CG/Bur (10) 19

5 Report CG/Bur (6) 58

6 Report CG/Bur (9) 59

7 Report CG/Bur (10) 89

8 See CDL-EL (2005) 023 : Electoral code of Moldova, including amendments of 22 July 2005

This represented a substantial change from the July 10 elections. Notably absent were three of the four parliamentary parties: the Communist Party, Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic People's Party. It was believed in some quarters that these parties were not willing to expose their candidates to another election which was expected to fail. In their place, there were a number of young and lesser known candidates with relatively little experience, which drew some political observers to comment that the parties were using this election to "try out" some of their younger players.

Eduard Musuc, Olga Nicolenco and Mircea Rusu withdrew their candidatures for the 11 December "repeat" elections.

Although several incidents were reported in the press concerning the nomination and registration of candidates, none of these were raised directly with the Congress delegation. The Moldova Nostra Alliance contested the registration of Vasile Ursu on the basis that he had submitted some false signatures, but the Central Electoral Commission threw out this complaint. The number of contested signatures was in fact a small percentage of the total number submitted by Mr Ursu.

Visibility

The campaign was striking for its low profile. There was little evidence of the campaign on the street, few meetings and almost no election posters. Several reasons were given for this:

- depletion of campaign funds (this being the fourth election this year)
- lack of heavyweight candidates
- political inexperience of the candidates
- lack of a real competition, since the favourite candidate, Mr Ursu, was also the *ad interim* mayor, and therefore was likely to remain in office whether or not the election was a success
- expectations that the election would fail
- lack of significant differences in policies

The campaign for the "repeat" election of 11 December was even more subdued, although there continued to be some political debate in the media, notably on the radio.

The Congress delegation saw few spaces that had been provided for authorised campaign adverts. Most of the posters observed dated from the previous campaign, advertising the candidate of the ruling party, who was not contesting these elections. The provision of advertising space does not appear to have improved since it was criticised in the report of the July 2005 elections.

Some candidates complained that they were either refused permission to hold meetings in public buildings (schools, hospitals etc.) or given time-slots which were inappropriate, and that the administration of the mayor-in-office had given out instructions to public institutions not to facilitate the campaign activities of the other candidates.

Media coverage

The high point in the campaign was the media coverage. This had been repeatedly criticized in previous Council of Europe reports on elections in Moldova. On this occasion the delegation noted a marked improvement in the quality and balance of the media coverage, notably television. The election was covered on several TV stations, including a 90-minute daily slot on the local television channel Euro TV Chisinau. TeleRadio Moldova also ran regular television debates and radio programmes on the elections. On 1 November, the Chisinau District Electoral Board doubled the free airtime allotted to each candidate to 20 minutes on television and 40 minutes on radio, with political advertising restricted to three minutes per day on television and five minutes on radio. Candidates were also allowed 180 minutes per week for public debates.

Some candidates complained that they were obliged to use their 20-minute television airtime in one session, whereas it would have been more effective to split it into four 5-minute shots. The timing of the coverage was also a source of contention. Most programmes went out at 5pm, which was an unpopular choice of time, when most people were out at work. Other observers argued that, since this was a local election, it would be unfair to viewers to block prime time national TV for this purpose.

A late intervention by the Central Electoral Commission resulted in some prime time coverage in the last days of the campaign. The national public television and Euro TV Chisinau were obliged to change the hour for broadcasting of electoral debates to 6pm for Thursday 24 and Friday 25 November, the last days of electoral debates.

Government intervention

The campaign was criticized as having been prejudiced by high-profile interventions of the President and the Prime Minister. The President, speaking on the Maxima programme on the NIT channel on October 24, announced that the Communist party would not field a candidate, and urged voters to support the acting mayor Mr Ursu.

The Central Election Commission, having examined the complaints concerning this intervention, concluded, on 25 November, that the President had not violated the Election Code through his television statements. At the same time, the Commission obliged the TV channel PRO TV Chisinau to offer the right of reply to the candidate of the Alliance Our Moldova (AMN).

A related complaint concerned the issue of the "microbuses". Reform of the city public transport system is currently a major local issue. Small privately-run minibuses, known as "microbuses", have proliferated in Chisinau and it is claimed that they number up to 1800. During the campaign, these buses were suddenly banned by decision of the president from the main street of the capital. At the same time, the government promised substantial funds for various municipal projects. The timing of these announcements and the sudden presidential interest in Chisinau's local affairs were regarded in many quarters as political interference in the campaign.

Other complaints

The question of the abuse of public resources for the benefit of candidates supported by the governing majority has been raised several times in previous election observation reports. On this occasion, the ad interim mayor was accused of having used public funds to finance his campaign. Further to this, he

was asked to suspend his mayoral activities during the campaign. Although he agreed to officially step down as mayor, it would seem that he continued to participate in a number of official events during the campaign.

The change in composition of the Central Electoral Commission during the campaign was widely commented on. The tenure of the old commission expired on 12 November, just two weeks before the election. The new commission did not take its first decision until 23 November. This change in makeup inevitably disrupted the Commission's electoral monitoring capacity. There was a break of eleven days where the Commission was inactive and unable to handle any complaints. This should be avoided in future elections.

Evaluation of the campaign

In its press release, the Congress delegation expressed its concern at the lack of public interest generated by the campaign, while noting that there had been a significant improvement in the quality and balance of the television coverage. The delegation attributed the low profile of the campaign to the lack of involvement of the main political leaders and the phenomenon of election fatigue, resulting from an unusually large number of elections within a short space of time.

However, given that a similar lack of campaign dynamism had been observed during previous missions, the delegation is of the opinion that another factor to consider may be the relative low level of experience at running political campaigns. The delegation considers that this may be an area where the Congress can help to share the experiences of the older democracies which are members of the Council of Europe.

The delegation believes that, although the organisation of the campaign in Chisinau showed a clear improvement compared with the local elections of July 2005, it was still not fully satisfactory. There is still room for improvement in a number of areas, such as the allocation of space for campaign posters and the timing and allocation of media slots.

3 Polling day

Polling began at 7am and ended at 9pm. There were 283 polling stations in all in the Chisinau municipality area.

On 27 November, the three Congress teams visited 50 polling stations in Chisinau, concentrating on the suburbs of Botanica, Ciocana, Rascani and Bubuieci. The teams also observed the opening of three polling stations and the counting process in three stations.

On 11 December, the two observer teams visited 40 polling stations throughout the city, concentrating on the central district and the suburbs of Botanica, Ciocana, Rascani and Orasul Sangeră. One team also visited a prison (Chisinau Prison) to observe the conditions in which prisoners not deprived of their civil rights were able to vote. The teams observed the opening of polling stations and the vote count in two stations.

In its assessment of polling stations, the Congress teams used the election observation form adopted by the Venice Commission at its 63rd meeting in June 2005.⁹

⁹ CDL-AD(2005)013

Opening of Poll stations

There were no serious problems observed in the opening of the poll stations. The electoral bureaux in the polling stations which were observed were at full strength, with one exception, and familiar with the procedures. One station opened seven minutes late, the others opened on time.

In one of the stations observed, the office with the safe was two storeys above the actual polling area, which posed logistical difficulties for the running of the polling station.

Design and layout of polling stations

A significant proportion of the stations observed had over 2000 names on their voter lists. Although this is in conformity with the Electoral Code (Article 29), which allows up to 3000 voters, per electoral district, the delegation considers that 2000 or more voters per district is excessive and urges the Central Electoral Commission to consider reorganising the division of electoral districts with a view to avoiding having more than 1500 voters in any one district. On this occasion, however, there were no problem related to excessive numbers of voters on voter lists because of the low turnout.

In all stations observed, there were sufficient voting booths for the number of people voting. The secrecy of the ballot was in the most part respected, although in one station the voting booth curtains were so short that the voters could be seen making their stamp. The delegation was dissatisfied with the layout and security of several polling stations and believes that there is room for improvement in this area.

The problem of wheelchair accessibility, noted in previous reports, has not been resolved. The delegation estimated that about 80% of the polling stations observed were not accessible. However, it is recognised that this is a general problem with public buildings in Moldova and that the situation will only improve when there is a national initiative to make public buildings accessible to disabled persons. On the other hand, this did not prevent people from voting, since people with mobility difficulties can request to vote at home. This system of “mobile voting”, which was observed at previous elections, appears to work well. The public are aware of this option and each polling station observed had received a number of requests from people wishing to vote at home.

The new voting procedures were set out in posters financed by the OSCE, in Romanian and Russian language, which were to be displayed in all polling stations. The delegation observed the posters in all the polling stations that it visited, although in a small number of cases only one language version was displayed.

Ballot boxes

Most ballot boxes seem old and in dire need of replacement. They come in all shapes and sizes, with a lot of them dating from the Communist era, as is evident by the design and decorations. Although the ballot boxes were all sealed, many of them were held together with tape and had gaps around the lids. The delegation considers that the use of new, transparent plastic ballot boxes in every polling station in the country should be made a priority.

The delegation observed some confusion about where to place the counterfoils. In some polling stations, these were placed in a second box, identical to the ballot box. In others, the polling station officials had provided a smaller box. Some polling stations had no receptacles whatsoever for the

counterfoils and were piling them on the desk. The delegation was informed that, new regulations concerning the treatment of counterfoils would come into force on 1 January 2006, following the passing of new amendments to the Electoral Code by Parliament on 17 November 2005. In future, the counterfoil will be placed in a separate sealed urn. However, since these amendments were not provided to the Congress delegation during its visits, the delegation would like to invite the Moldovan authorities to confirm the future arrangements.

Electoral bureaux

The voting was marked by the calm atmosphere in the polling stations and the undisputed professionalism of the local election committee members. The Congress observers noted that the polling stations were generally well organised, the election committees were present in full and their members were generally well informed of their duties and the procedure to follow. A high proportion of the chairpersons of the electoral bureaux were women. The Congress observers also noted that staffing levels in some polling stations dropped considerably at midday when some members of the polling station team were having lunch. The delegation suggests that electoral bureaux are given clear instructions about maintaining staffing levels throughout the voting process.

Polling station officials confirmed that they had all received training on the new procedures in the form of seminars organised by the chairpersons of the electoral bureaux, who had themselves received training from the Central Electoral Commission.

Conduct of the poll

Inside the polling stations the delegation noted the presence of numerous observers representing different parties, candidates or NGOs. The Congress found no obvious flaws in the voting process, or signs of pressure on the voters. The Congress teams received oral reports from a large number of these observers. The observers did not report any serious interference in the voting process.

For the “repeat” elections of 11 December, the same ballot papers were reprinted. For logistical reasons, the papers were printed before the deadline for withdrawing candidatures, with the result that they featured the three candidates who withdrew from the “repeat” election. As a result each ballot paper had to have the mention “withdrawn” stamped next to each of these three candidates. This had the effect of confusing some voters, and led to a higher number of ballot papers being declared null and void for the “repeat” election. Since the ballot papers were only delivered the night before the election, the polling station teams had no time to stamp the papers before voting began, which meant that they had to divert some of their staff to this task during the polling process.

In one medical facility which was visited, the supplementary list of patients eligible to vote was still being prepared at 4pm on polling day, which was an evident source of anxiety for the voters concerned.

Secrecy of the ballot

The practice whereby a member of the precinct electoral bureau stamps the ballot paper after the voter has voted, as provided for in Article 54 of the Electoral Code, was criticised in the report of the 2003 elections and again in the report of the July 2005 elections.

The Congress observers are convinced that this practice jeopardises the secrecy of the ballot, by giving the precinct electoral bureau member an opportunity to see which candidate the voter has voted for. The procedure should therefore be changed, to bring it into line with the Venice Commission’s Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (para.35), for example by stamping the ballot paper before

the voter has voted. It was not clear that all polling station staff, a number of whom were appointed before Moldova became independent, were sufficiently aware of the importance of having a secret ballot. In one polling station, members of the electoral bureau were overheard commenting on how one person had voted.

Despite the well-designed OSCE posters explaining the new voting slips, which were clearly visible in all polling stations visited, there was still considerable confusion on how to use the new voting slips, especially on the part of the more elderly voters.

The difficulty that may voters had in tearing off the counterfoil, led a number of polling station officials to intervene and to help the voters by tearing off the slip for them. Although these actions were well-intentioned, by handling the voting slips after the person had indicated their choice, the officials were again in danger of violating the secrecy of the ballot. It was suggested that the ballot paper could be improved to better distinguish the counterfoil from the rest of the ballot paper.

Presence of unauthorised persons

The Congress report on the July 2005 elections noted a significant improvement as regards the presence of police officers inside, outside and in the immediate vicinity of polling stations.

However, it seems that the police, who are present in uniform at the opening of the polling stations, and at the closing of the vote, are also present throughout the day. During the day they are required to change into plain clothes and to remain in the vicinity of the polling stations. This new policy was confirmed by numerous polling station officials and was apparently introduced during 2005. It is not clear why it was introduced, unless it was a reaction to previous complaints about the visible police presence in and around polling stations. However, if this is the case, the new situation is actually more ambiguous than the previous one, and therefore less satisfactory. A number of people in and around polling stations, who had no visible identification, were identified by polling station staff as police. Since they are usually the same people who are present in uniform at the opening and closing of the poll, the polling station staff have no trouble identifying them. The presence of these persons inside or in the immediate vicinity of polling stations is clearly contrary to international standards.

At a number of polling stations, the observation teams found people present who were not members of the precinct bureau and were reluctant to reveal their identity. Some of these were identified by the polling station chairpersons as drivers for the mobile votes. The delegation considers that, if there is a valid reason for their presence, they should receive proper identification from the Central Electoral Commission.

Supplementary voting lists

Non-registered voters may register their names on a "supplementary" register established by the polling station committee, on presentation of papers attesting to their place of residence. This procedure generally benefits voters as it allows them to exercise their right to vote even if their name has inadvertently been left off the electoral register.

The delegation noted that the percentage of voters registered on supplementary lists was very small. In almost all cases there was a convincing explanation of why a voter was not on the voter list (the

voter had recently turned eighteen or changed address). Polling office officials expressed satisfaction with the quality and coverage of the voter lists as compared with the March elections.

For the repeat elections, the supplementary lists were used in conjunction to the printed voter lists, so that voters were not required to register a second time.

Stamping of identity papers

There remains widespread resentment of the practice of stamping "Votat" ("voted") on the appendices of identity cards to show which voters have voted. Voters believe that this is a violation of the secrecy of the voting process and that it will subsequently be used to discriminate against them. Some voters also expressed fears that these stamps would create problems for travel to the Transdnestrian region, although the delegation was not informed of any specific case that proved that this had actually occurred.

This was already noted in the report on the July elections. In November, polling station officials reported a number of incidents of voters who had come to the voting stations simply to state that they were unwilling to vote because of this practice.

The delegation considers that this practice is unnecessary and unhelpful. It does not contribute anything to the efficient management of the voting practice and should be discontinued.

Other problems encountered

One voter was observed handing money to a polling station official. On further investigation, the delegation was unable to ascertain whether this exchange was in any way connected with the voting process. The delegation considers that, whatever the motive for the transaction, such behaviour is out of place in a polling station and that this should be made clear to polling station officials during their training.

Counting of votes and announcement of results

On the whole, the counting of votes transpired without incident and the results were properly announced in the polling stations. The Central Electoral Commission published the results in due time.

Results for 27 November

<i>name</i>	<i>party</i>	<i>votes</i>	<i>%</i>
Vasile Ursu	Independent Candidate	59,570	46.66
Dorin Chirtoaca	Liberal Party	32,098	25.14
Mircea Rusu	Alliance "Moldova Noastra"	13,096	10.25
Valentin Krilov	Patria-Rodina-Ravnopravie	8,151	6.32
Eduard Musuc	Social Democrat Party	5,991	4.69
Oleg Cernei	Ecologist Party	4,970	3.89
Olga Nicolenco	Social Liberal Party	2,2763	1.78
Gheorghe Sima	Labor Union Patria - Rodina	1,521	1.19

Results for 11 December

name	party	votes	%
Vasile Ursu	Independent Candidate	67,279	52.91
Dorin Chirtoaca	Liberal Party	45,299	35.62
Valentin Krilov	Patria-Rodina-Ravnopravie	8,803	6.92
Oleg Cernei	Ecologist Party	4,462	3.51
Gheorghe Sima	Labor Union Patria - Rodina	1,324	1.04

4 Conclusions and recommendations

The delegation was positively impressed by the efficiency with which the poll was organised and the absence of any electoral fraud. It is convinced that the Moldova authorities are continuing to make improvements in this area and that the dialogue with the Moldovan authorities continues to bear fruit, thanks to the constructive approach of the Moldovan authorities. The ongoing collaboration with the Venice Commission in reviewing the Electoral Code is an important aspect of this dialogue.

The delegation is convinced that the elections were free and fair and largely met with international standards. However, it remains concerned at the readiness of the government to intervene in the campaign.

The key question for these elections was their repeated failure and the resulting growing risk of popular disenchantment with the political process. The failure of four elections in a row points to a weakness in the electoral process which has to be addressed urgently. The Congress team notes that the Central Electoral Commission is conducting a review of the situation. On 17 December it organised a round table with political parties and representatives of civil society to discuss how to resolve the electoral crisis. At this meeting, the political and NGO representatives were against the organisation of a further round of elections, but could not agree on whether or not to abolish the participation threshold and agreed to appoint an *ad hoc* group to study the various options with a view to making a proposal in January.

Given the next general local elections are due next year and that the current ad-interim mayor was the voter's clear favourite, it would not be unreasonable to ask him to continue as ad interim mayor for another year.

In the light of its observations on the conduct of these elections, the Congress delegation makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations

General

- review the Electoral Code with a view to abolishing the turnout threshold

The Campaign

- provide more public advertising space for candidates
- review the timing and length of free media coverage for candidates
- review candidates' access to public buildings for campaign meetings

Organisation of the poll

- provide new plastic transparent ballot boxes for each polling station
- review the policy of using plain-clothes policemen to protect polling stations
- take care to ensure only authorised persons are present in polling stations, and that their identity badges are clearly visible
- abolish the practice of stamping "Votat" on identity card appendices
- abolish the practice of handling ballot papers after the voter has made their choice
- ensure that there are clear procedures for processing the voting counterfoils
- ensure that electoral bureaux be given clear instructions about maintaining staffing levels throughout the voting process.
- review the organisation of electoral districts, fixing a threshold of 1500 voters per district.

Programme

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Local elections observation mission Chisinau, 24–28 November 2005

Congress Delegation

Mr. David LLOYD-WILLIAMS, member of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress; Councillor, North Yorkshire County Council, UK (ILDG)

Mrs. Ömür AYBAR, member of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress; Member of Istanbul Provincial Council/Beyoglu, Turkey (EPP)

Mr. Fabio PELLEGRINI, member of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress; Consigliere comunale, Rapolano Terme (SI); Segreteria generale AICCRE, Italy (SOC)

Mr. Viatcheslav ROGOV, member of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress; Head, City of Pokrov (Vladimir Region), Russian Federation (ILDG)

Congress Secretariat

Mr. Jean-Philippe BOZOULS, Secretary of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress

Mr. Tim LISNEY, member of the Secretariat of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Thursday, 24 November

Arrival of the Congress delegation at the International Airport Chisinau and accommodation at the Hotel “Dedeman Grand”

Friday, 25 November

9:00 – 10:00 Ambassador Vladimir PHILIPOV, SRSG in RM (SRSG office)

10:20 – 11:20 Claus NEUKIRCH, Spokes Person, OSCE Press Officer
(OSCE Mission Headquarters)

11:30 – 12:30 Meeting with media representatives (SRSG Meeting Room)

INFOTAG – Igor VOLNITCHII
TIMPUL – Ina PRISACARU
Europa Libera – Valentina URSU

12:30 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 14:50 Dumitru DIACOV, Chairman of the DP faction in Parliament of RM, (Parliament, room 609)

- 15:00 – 15:50 Vlad CUBREACOV, Chairman of the CDPP faction in Parliament of RM, (Parliament, room 609)
- 16:00 – 16:50 Serafim URECHEAN, Chairman of the Alliance Moldova Noastra faction in Parliament of RM (Parliament, room 609)
- 17:00 – 17:50 Eugenia OSTAPCIUC, Chairman of CPRM faction in Parliament (Parliament, room 609)

Saturday, 26 November

- 8:30 - 8:45 Eugeniu STIRBU, Chairman of Central Electoral Commission of RM, (CEC, Alexandri street 119)
- 9:00 – 9:45 Paul STRUTZESCU, Chairman of LADOM NGO (LADOM, Alexandri street 13)
- 10.00 – 10:30 Valentin CRILOV, Candidate from Patria-Rodina-Ravnopravie (SRSG office)
- 10.30 – 11:00 Eduard MUSUC, Candidate from the Social Democrat Party of RM (SRSG office)
- 11:00 – 11:30 Dorin CHIRTOACA, Candidate from the Liberal Party (SRSG office)
- 11:30 – 12:00 Gheorghe SIMA, Candidate from Labor Union Patria - Rodina (SRSG office)
- 12:00 – 12:30 Mircea RUSU, Candidate from Alliance “Moldova Noastra” (SRSG office)

- 12:30 – 14:00 Lunch
- 14:00 – 14:30 Olga NICOLENCO, Candidate from the Social Liberal Party (SRSG office)
- 15:00 – 15:30 Oleg CERNEI, Candidate from the Ecologist Party of RM (SRSG office)

Sunday 27 November

- Early morning: Deployment of Observation teams
- Visits to polling stations and observation of the count
- Delegation meeting: polling observations

Monday 28 November

- Press Conference (SRSG office)
- Departure of the Congress delegation

**Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
Local elections observation mission
Chisinau, 9 – 12 December 2005**

Congress Delegation

Mr. David LLOYD-WILLIAMS, member of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress; Councillor, North Yorkshire County Council, UK (ILDG)

Mrs. Ömür AYBAR, member of the Chamber of Regions of the Congress; Member of Istanbul Provincial Council/Beyoglu, Turkey (EPP)

Congress Secretariat

Mr. Jean-Philippe BOZOULS, Secretary of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress

Mr. Tim LISNEY, member of the Secretariat of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Friday, 9 December

15:20 Arrival of the Congress Secretariat

18:30 Meeting with Ambassador Vladimir PHILPOV, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe at Chisinau

Saturday, 10 December

10:00 – 10:45 Vasile URSU, independent Candidate (SRSG office)

11:00 – 11:45 Meeting with Mihail SIDOROV, Deputy Chairman of the Legal Commission for Appointments and Immunities of the Parliament (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova)

12:00 – 12:45 Dorin CHIRTOACA, Candidate from the Liberal Party (SRSG office)

13:00 – 14:30 Lunch

14:40 – 15:20 Igor VOLNITSCHII, Press Agency “INFOTAG” (SRSG office)

15:30 – 16:15 Oleg CERNEI, Candidate from the Ecologist Party of RM (SRSG office)

Sunday 11 December

Early morning: Deployment of Observation teams

Visits to polling stations and observation of the count

Delegation meeting: polling observations

Monday 12 December

Press Conference (SRSG office)

Departure of the Congress delegation

Press Release

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Chisinau local elections: a clean and orderly poll after an uninspired electoral campaign

Chisinau, 28.11.2005. A delegation from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe visited Moldova from 24 to 28 November to observe the first round of the local elections taking place in the capital city and thirteen other districts.

The Congress delegation, led by David Lloyd-Williams (UK, ILDG), was composed of Omür Aybar (Turkey, EPP/CD), Fabio Pellegrini (Italy, SOC) and Viatcheslav Rogov (Russia, ILDG).

The European local representatives met with Eugeniu Stirbu, the newly appointed president of the Central Electoral Commission, as well as most of the candidates, representatives of the various parliamentary parties, the media, the local OSCE mission and local NGOs. They were able to observe the poll in some fifty polling stations in the capital.

"The elections met with international standards and for the most part respected the electoral code" declared David Lloyd-Williams. However, the delegation also voiced its concern at the lack of public interest generated by the campaign. Despite a notable improvement in the quality and balance of the television coverage of the campaign, it remained "dull and uninspired" according to the head of delegation. "The lack of involvement of the main political leaders was undoubtedly a factor in the low interest in the election, which once again did not attain the 33% turnout needed for it to be valid".

After this fruitless first round, the European delegation called on "all Moldovan political players, after these three abortive elections, to assume their responsibilities and take appropriate action so that the city of Chisinau might have a properly elected and respected Mayor, with a real democratic mandate, as quickly as possible".

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Failure of Chisinau election: towards a change of the electoral code?

Chisinau, 12.12.2005 – A delegation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe visited Moldova from 9 to 12 December to observe the Chisinau mayoral election on 11 December. On 27 November a delegation had already observed the first round of the election in the Moldovan capital, but the results had been declared invalid because of the low turnout.

The Congress delegation, comprising David Lloyd-Williams (United-Kingdom, ILDG) and Omür Aybar (Turkey, EPP/CD), met several of the candidates, the local media and the chairman of the Legal Commission of the Moldovan Parliament. They also observed the poll in some forty polling stations in the capital as well as the central prison.

“There will always be room for improvement in the organisation of the campaign and the voting procedures, but these elections were largely free and fair and complied with international standards”, stated the head of delegation David Lloyd-Williams.

“However, once again the election did not attain the 33% turnout needed for the results to be valid. This situation, the fourth such failure this year, cannot be allowed to continue”.

The Congress delegation considers that it is up to the Government, the Parliament and the Central Electoral Commission to take special measures urgently in order to break the electoral deadlock. The European delegation concluded: “We recommend that the Moldovan authorities first of all take the steps necessary to appoint a mayor for Chisinau, with a broad political consensus, until the 2007 local elections, and then to consider introducing reforms, in cooperation with the various political parties, to avoid any such stalemate in future. We are convinced that the Congress could be of help in finding the way forward.”