

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 413 (2018)¹ Observation of municipal elections in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (15 October 2017)

1. Following the invitation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Nikola Dimitrov, dated 5 September 2017, to observe the municipal elections held in the country on 15 October 2017, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:

a. Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Committee of Ministers’ Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2015)9 relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the revised Charter appended thereto;

b. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” on 6 June 1997, and the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), ratified on 30 September 2015;

c. Chapter XVIII of the *Rules and Procedures* of the Congress on the practical organisation of election observation missions.

2. It reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance, and observation of political participation at territorial level is a key element in the Congress’ role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.

3. The Congress welcomes the fact that the 15 October 2017 municipal elections were well organised, by and large, and in line with international standards, despite some procedural irregularities, and that the election was, overall, held in an orderly and calm matter, without major incidents, preceded by a competitive campaign.

4. Although the overall political situation continued to be characterised by the deep division and politicisation of the country along ethnic and party lines, the Congress notes a

clear improvement in the campaign atmosphere in which the municipal elections took place.

5. It recognises that progress was made, in particular, in respect of a more balanced media coverage of the campaign, respect for freedom of the media and better working conditions for journalists, despite further need for their professionalisation and empowerment.

6. In the light of the above, the Congress suggests that further improvements can still be made in respect of the general electoral process and therefore invites the authorities of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” to:

a. strengthen the integrity of the decision-making process at the level of the State Election Commission (SEC) in order to make decisions more comprehensible to the public and fully transparent, and to further de-politicise the SEC;

b. improve the legal conditions for effective redress in electoral disputes, so that all complaints and appeals are handled in a timely and impartial manner by the relevant electoral authorities and that all decisions can be appealed to a competent court of higher level;

c. organise systematic training of electoral staff in order to ensure the coherent implementation of electoral rules, notably with regard to the proper sealing of ballot boxes, the systematic signing of voters’ lists and prescribed counting procedures;

d. ensure a level playing field for all contestants by making certain that there is a clear separation of State and party interests and preventing misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes;

e. in addition to the quota requirement, ensure the de facto participation of women in grass-roots politics, including ensuring that female candidates have similar opportunities to run for the positions of mayors and heads of councils.

7. Furthermore, the Congress encourages the authorities of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” to pay further attention to the issue of accuracy of voters’ lists, including through the update of the population census.

8. In conclusion, the Congress reaffirms the need for municipalities to have access to adequate financial resources in general, and, more specifically, with regard to their capacity to organise local elections.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 28 March 2018 and adopted by the Congress on 28 March 2018, 2nd sitting (see Document [CPL34\(2018\)02](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Karim VAN OVERMEIRE, Belgium (R, NR)