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Report
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Partial local elections in Belgrade and several other municipalities in Serbia (3 April 2022)

Monitoring Committee

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Summary

Overall, the Congress delegation found the 2022 partial local elections calm and orderly, despite recent adoption of legal amendments and revision of the composition of polling boards which resulted in an uneven level of training and preparedness of the polling staff. In general, the campaign was highly polarised and marked by numerous allegations of vote buying, pressures on voters, uneven access to the media and misuse of administrative resources. The Election Day was generally transparent and in line with the appropriate provisions in most polling stations visited, despite some notable procedural inconsistencies and incidents.

The Congress delegation identified several areas where there is still room for improvement, notably regarding previous Congress, OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations which remain to be addressed, in particular on voter registration, regulation of campaign and party finance, media access, misuse of administrative resources, announcement of results, layout and accessibility of polling stations and composition and professionalisation of polling boards. Furthermore, the delegation reiterates previous Congress recommendation that local elections should be held separately from national polls not to overshadow local issues and to overload election administration bodies.

¹ Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
 EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
 SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats
 ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group
 ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
 NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

RECOMMENDATION 282 (2022)²

1. Following the invitation by the authorities of the Republic of Serbia, dated 18 February 2022, to observe partial local elections held in the country on 3 April 2022, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by Serbia on 6 September 2007;

c. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions.

2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance and that observation of grassroots elections is a key element in the Congress' role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.

3. The Congress acknowledges that, overall, the legal framework is conducive to holding democratic elections, and that recent amendments have addressed some long-standing issues, despite being adopted shortly before the elections which is contrary to the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.

4. The Congress welcomes the fact that the Election Day was generally calm and transparent, despite some notable incidents and procedural inconsistencies.

5. The Congress regrets that the campaign was highly polarised and marred by recurring allegations of misuse of administrative resources, vote-buying, uneven access to the media and pressures on voters and public-sector employees.

6. The Congress reiterates that the concurring organisation of presidential, parliamentary and local elections poses considerable challenges to the electoral administration, contributes to excessively focusing the campaign upon national political issues and should therefore be reconsidered by the authorities in the future.

7. In light of the above, the Congress invites the authorities of Serbia, in particular, to:

a. step-up the effectiveness of existing legal provisions to prevent misuse of administrative resources and vote-buying to ensure a level playing field for all candidates and to strengthen trust in electoral processes;

b. further strengthen the regulatory framework ensuring transparency and accountability of campaign finances, including oversight and investigation powers of the Anti-Corruption Agency;

c. address issues pertaining to breaches of the secrecy of the vote by revising provisions on polling station set-up, such as improving polling booths design, and taking measures to limit overcrowding and family voting;

d. consider granting members of the extended composition of polling boards the status of accredited observers and to revise provisions to render training on electoral procedures systematic for all members of the election administration to ensure professionalism and impartiality in electoral management;

e. continue efforts to further improve the accuracy of voter lists by deploying a full audit of the Unified Voters Register and deleting 'phantom' voters or deceased voters;

² Approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 26 October 2022 and adopted by the Congress on 26 October 2022, 2nd Sitting (see Document CPL(2022)43-02, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Carla DEJONGHE, Belgium (R, ILDG).

f. fully implement existing media legislation including oversight and enforcement powers of bodies responsible for media monitoring, to ensure equal access of all political subjects to the media, and to undertake measures to protect freedom of the media and limit the spread of disinformation and hate speech;

g. improve accessibility of polling stations to support participation of voters with impaired mobility or other disabilities.

8. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and other relevant institutions of the Council of Europe to take account of this Recommendation regarding the 2022 partial local elections in Serbia and of the explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM³

1. INTRODUCTION

1. Following the invitation by the President of the Republic Electoral Commission of the Republic of Serbia dated 18 February 2022, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe deployed an on-site election observation mission to observe the partial local elections held on 3 April 2022 in 13 municipalities, including in the cities of Belgrade and Bor⁴. Significantly, these local elections were held on the same date as parliamentary and presidential elections.

2. The delegation participating in the election observation mission was deployed to Serbia from 31 March to 5 April and consisted of 15 observers from 11 European countries, including Congress members and representatives of the Secretariat. Ms Carla DEJONGHE, Belgium (ILDG, R) served as Head of Delegation. On 1 and 2 April 2022, the delegation held preparatory meetings with representatives of the State authorities, diplomatic corps, NGOs, media and political subjects. The Congress delegation also attended a joint briefing with the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), including delegations from PACE, OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE PA and the European Parliament.

3. On the Election Day, seven Congress teams were deployed to the capital of Serbia, Belgrade, and to municipalities of Arandjelovac, Smederevska Palanka, Kula and Sečanj to monitor the election procedures, from opening to closing, in about one hundred polling stations. On 4 April 2022, the Head of Delegation held a press conference attended by domestic journalists where preliminary findings of the mission were presented. Composition of the delegation, full programme and deployment plan can be found in the appendices.

4. The following report focuses specifically on issues arising out of exchanges held with Congress interlocutors in the context of the 3 April 2022 partial local elections in Serbia and observations on the Election Day. The Congress wishes to thank all those who met with the delegation for their open and constructive dialogue.

2. POLITICAL CONTEXT

5. Serbia is a Parliamentary Republic with a President as Head of State and a Prime Minister as Head of Government. The President is directly elected for a five-year term from a single nationwide constituency. Serbia has a unicameral Parliament which is normally elected every four years. The 250 Members of the National Assembly are elected through a proportional system with closed candidate lists from a single nationwide constituency, with a threshold exemption for lists representing national minorities.

6. The 2022 general elections in Serbia, consisting of presidential, parliamentary and partial local elections, took place in an atmosphere shaped by external and domestic tensions. Local elections were called on 15 February 2022 by the President of the Assembly of Serbia, Ivica DAČIĆ, while early parliamentary elections were called by President Aleksandar VUČIĆ on the same day.

7. Previous parliamentary elections were held in June 2020 but were largely boycotted by the opposition, citing the lack of conditions for holding elections and concerns about media freedom. Consequently, the parties belonging to the ruling coalition obtained 231 of the 250 parliamentary seats while four parties representing national minorities held the 19 remaining seats. Shortly after the 2020 elections, President VUČIĆ declared that early parliamentary elections would take place in 2022.

8. Local elections are called after the four-year mandate of the council expires, which entails that not all local elections in Serbia are called on the same day. The latest local elections were held in June 2020 in 154 municipalities, with some notable exceptions including Belgrade City Assembly. The opposition also largely boycotted these elections, held on the same day than parliamentary elections.

³ Prepared with the contribution of Dr Brid QUINN, Ireland, member of the Congress Group of Independent Experts,.

⁴ The 13 municipalities electing councillors on 3 April 2022 were: Arandjelovac, Bajina Bašta, Belgrade, Bor, Doljevac, Kladovo, Knjaževac, Kula, Lučanj, Majdanpek, Medveda, Sečanj, Smederevska Palanka. Elections for the city municipality of Sevojno were called on 8 February by the President of the City Assembly of Užice, but city municipalities are not considered units of self-government and the elections in Sevojno will not be addressed in this report.

The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), the ruling party since 2012, secured an absolute majority in the provincial parliament of Vojvodina, and a majority in roughly 90% local governments throughout Serbia⁵.

9. In 2018, local elections were last held for the City Assembly of Belgrade⁶. Following the 2018 elections, the party allocation of the 110 seats in the Belgrade Assembly was as follows: SNS-led coalition (64), Dragan ĐILAS⁷list - (26), Aleksandar ŠAPIĆ (12), Socialist Party of Serbia – United Serbia (SPS–JS) (8). Zoran RADOJIČIĆ (SNS) was mayor from 2018 to 2022. The SNS-led coalition obtained the majority of seats in the City Assembly of Belgrade in 2014 and 2018. All 12 other municipalities were also run by the SNS or SNS-led coalitions.

10. The boycott of the 2020 elections further eroded trust and confidence in the electoral system. To counter this, an interparty dialogue (IPD) between the Government and the opposition, mediated by members of the European Parliament (EP), resulted in the adoption, on 18 September 2021, of a number of measures aimed at improving the electoral process. A second dialogue was launched under the auspices of the Speaker of the Serbian Assembly, held in parallel without foreign mediation, and led to an agreement on 29 October 2021 between nine political parties.

11. Following the October 2021 Agreement, legislative changes to the electoral legal framework were introduced in February 2022. These changes included: alterations to the composition of electoral commissions, providing temporary representation for non-parliamentary opposition at all levels of the election administration; rules to ensure gender balance and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in elections; extended timeframes and legal standing for dispute resolution; amendments to the framework for political party and campaign funding and disclosure and new rules on campaign coverage in the media. The amendments served to eliminate some loopholes and to overcome some perceived flaws in the existing electoral law. However, the changes were introduced close to the Election Day and implemented in a very tight timeframe, increasing pressure on electoral bodies and generating some uncertainty among candidates, citizens and administrators. On 16 January 2022, a constitutional referendum related to the appointment of judges and prosecutors was held, with the lowest turnout since 1990, and the Constitution was subsequently amended on 9 February.

12. The 2022 campaign was marked by international developments which overshadowed local politics and dominated media coverage. The position of Serbia regarding the Russian war against Ukraine dominated the media while relations and disagreements with the European Union remained in the background. In December 2021, Serbia was permitted to start EU accession talks on four new negotiation chapters.

13. International organisations and domestic observers have expressed concerns about intense polarisation and progressive degradation of political and media pluralism in Serbia in the aftermath of the 2020 local and parliamentary elections⁸. The end of the boycott by opposition parties in the 2022 elections was a positive development. Domestically, strong political polarisation, concerns about unequal conditions for election contestants, allegations of vote-buying and misuse of administrative resources and numerous demonstrations on the environmental or the handling of Covid-19 marked the pre-election environment. The atmosphere was one with expectations of change but also an atmosphere of distrust.

3. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

14. The territorial organisation of Serbia is asymmetrical. It is regulated by the Constitution and the Law on Territorial Organisation, the Law on Local Self-Government, and laws on the special status of Belgrade and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

5 NDI (2020) Serbia's June 2020 Elections available at <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Serbia%E2%80%99s%20June%202020%20Elections%20Public%20Report.pdf>

6 The Congress did not observe these elections.

7 Dragan ĐILAS was mayor of Belgrade from 2008 to 2013

8 See for more information: BTI Serbia Country Report 2022 Serbia, p. 32; Freedom House 2022 Serbia Report <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2022> and CRTA Final report on the 2020 Elections : <https://cрта.rs/en/crta-summary-and-recommendations-final-report-2020-elections/>

15. Local self-government is a one-tier system consisting of 174 local self-government units, including 145 municipalities (opštine), 28 cities (gradovi) and Belgrade with special status⁹. Local entities include a directly elected assembly of 19 to 75 members depending on the size of the population, two executive bodies (an indirectly elected mayor and a local council with 11 members and a president) and an administration. The assembly is elected through proportional voting for a mandate of four years. Prior to 2008, mayors were directly elected. The two executive bodies have different functions as stipulated in the legislation. Functions of municipalities include culture, education, health, social and child welfare, protection of the environment and agriculture, land and local roads, and urban planning.

16. Cities are larger entities, usually with at least 100 000 inhabitants, and can establish municipal police. They may also set up city municipalities (gradska opština) with their own decision-making bodies for certain parts of the city, but these city municipalities are not considered to be units of self-government. Out of the 13 municipalities electing their councillors on 3 April 2022, only Belgrade and Bor have the status of cities.

17. The status of the capital city of Belgrade is regulated by the Law on the Capital City and the Statute of the City of Belgrade. The main decision-making body is a directly elected city assembly, composed of 110 councillors. The assembly elects the mayor and, on his/her proposal, appoints the deputy mayor and members of the city council. In addition to the normal competences delegated to municipalities, the capital city is also in charge of water management, state roads, fire prevention and inspection controls in relation to planning. The city of Belgrade is divided into 17 city municipalities.¹⁰

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

18. Local elections are regulated by the 2006 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and the Law on Local Elections, as revised in 2022. Other aspects of the electoral process are regulated by the Law on Election of Members of Parliament; the Law on Political Parties; the Law on the Unified Voters' Register; the Law on Financing of Political Activities as well as the 2016 Law on Public Gatherings. The Republic Electoral Commission (REC) supplements the legal framework by adopting its own rules and decisions.

19. Members of local (and city) assemblies are elected directly every four years on a non-working day, through a closed-list proportional system and each municipality represents a single constituency. Mandates are allocated following the D'Hondt method among lists that receive more than three per cent of the votes cast. Lists representing minorities are exempted from the threshold. Coalitions are allowed between political parties registered in the Register of political parties. Groups of citizens can also submit an electoral list. After the election, elected councillors vote to elect a mayor for a four-year mandate.

20. Significant legal amendments to the electoral process, in particular to the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, the Law on Amending the Law on the Prevention of Corruption, the Law on Financing Political Activities and the Law on Local Elections were introduced prior to the 2022 elections reflecting ongoing international and domestic concerns about the electoral process. In its 2016 election observation report, the Congress assessed that 'further reform [was] required in order to complement the regulative framework of elections and fill legal gaps which include campaign and party financing, misuse of administrative resources and dispute resolution'¹¹. Other domestic and international observers have repeatedly made recommendations regarding election administration, dispute resolution and campaign finance, including in the aftermath of the 2020 elections¹². For the 2020 elections, some reforms had already been introduced and lowered of the threshold for candidate lists to obtain seats in Parliament; expanded the power to certify supporting signatures to local authorities, in addition to public notaries and courts, and enhanced representation of national minority lists.

⁹<http://mduls.gov.rs/registri/lokalne-samouprave-u-srbiji/?script=lat>

¹⁰ See the 2017 Congress Monitoring Report on local and regional democracy in Serbia and Recommendation 403 (2017) <http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168074fb82>

¹¹ Congress Information Report on the observation of local and provincial elections in Serbia, CG31(2016)21, p. 11 <http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680719942>

¹² See ODIHR 2020 Special Election Assessment Mission Final Report <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/serbia/466026> and CRTA Final report on the 2020 Elections, op.cit. CRTA described the 2020 elections as "worst of all election processes observed so far"

21. The new election laws were seen as important primarily in terms of improvement of election procedures; facilitation of candidacy of political parties representing national minorities, and better organisation and transparency of the work of election administration bodies¹³. The legislative changes included rules to ensure gender balance and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in election administration. Amendments were also introduced to the Law on Prevention of Corruption (LPC), the Law on Electronic Media and the Law on Public Information and Media. A temporary media supervisory body was also established, and the law now includes a possibility to scrutinise election material after the Election Day. One crucial change of the 2022 revisions was that Local Election Commissions (LECs) were for the first time assigned to manage and supervise the administration of national elections at the municipal level.

5. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

22. The Serbian election administration system has a three-tiered structure of electoral commissions, comprising the Republic Electoral Commission (REC); 166 local electoral commissions (LECs) and 8,267 polling boards (PBs). The February 2022 legislative changes formalised the LECs as administrators for national elections and modified the composition of all commissions, in line with the 2021 interparty Agreement.

23. The REC is a permanent body, consisting of a chairperson, currently Mr Vladimir DIMITRIJEVIC, and 16 permanent members with legal expertise (and their substitutes) nominated by political entities in proportion to their representation in the National Assembly of Serbia. For the 2022 elections and following the 2021 Agreement, the REC permanent composition was extended to 23 members, including six nominated by the non-parliamentary opposition parties, and one secretary and one deputy secretary. For the electoral period, each presidential and parliamentary contestant can appoint a member to the extended composition of all election commissions. Eleven members of the REC are currently women¹⁴.

24. The main tasks of the REC are to ensure the lawful conduct of the elections, coordinate the work of and provide all necessary information, equipment and training to lower-tier election administration bodies, inform and educate voters, release results and adjudicate complaints. Meetings of the REC are public and live streamed on the REC website.

25. LECs are established by the local assemblies. Members are appointed in proportion to their representation in local assemblies in the case of local elections¹⁵. For the 2022 elections, following the legislative changes, the composition of LECs consisted of one chairperson, one deputy-chairperson and between six to twelve members and six to twelve substitutes, depending on the number of registered voters in the relevant municipality¹⁶: The standing composition of a LEC for the national elections in April 2022 was enlarged in compliance with the new electoral laws, by an additional member and deputy member nominated by the REC on the proposal of the Speaker of the National Assembly. The extended composition included one member appointed by each presidential, parliamentary and local contestant. However, if a political subject was taking part in the three races concurrently, it could only appoint one LEC member. The legal deadline for establishment of LECs was respected.

26. LECs have the mandate to manage and supervise the elections in their respective administrative unit, determine location of polling stations, appoint and dismiss PBs, support the work of the PBs and adjudicate certain types of complaints, as specified by the REC¹⁷. Their work is also public.

27. The lower level of the election administration system is the polling board. In case of national and local elections being held on the same day, the standing composition of a polling board is appointed by

13 <http://mduls.gov.rs/en/announcements/amendments-to-the-set-of-election-laws-shall-improve-the-conditions-for-conducting-elections-at-the-national-and-local-level/>

14 Of the 23 permanent REC members, SNP nominated 8, SPS 3, and one member each was nominated by the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (PUPS), Social Democratic Party of Serbia (SDPS), the SVM, the SSP, the JS, the SDA, the Serbian Movement "Dveri", the DJB, the SDS, the POKS, the SRS, and the Serbian Party "Zavetnici" (SSZ), OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission (2022) Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions Preliminary Findings Report, p 5 available here : <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/serbia/515177>

15 If the local assembly is constituted by only one political group, then the local administration appoints half of the PB members. If one group has absolute majority in the local assembly, it can only appoint less than half of the members.

16 REC (2022) *Manual of Procedures for Polling Boards*

17 REC (2022) *Manual of Procedures for Polling Boards.*, p 6

the relevant LEC, on the proposal of parliamentary groups, and usually consists of a chairperson, two members and their deputies¹⁸. A deputy chairperson and a third member are appointed by the local assembly. The extended composition includes members and deputy members nominated by submitters of lists of candidates for local elections¹⁹. However, in the context of presidential, parliamentary and local elections taking place on the same day, extended composition included members nominated by political subjects running in national and local elections. In practice, this means that polling board members were often quite numerous on the Election Day. All members of the extended composition receive a daily allowance.

28. Polling boards are responsible, inter alia, for preparing and arranging polling stations, ensuring order, safety and secrecy of vote as well as conducting voting inside the station and outside (mobile ballot boxes). Upon completion of counting, PBs deliver the election materials to the LEC.

29. The election administration carried out all necessary tasks on time and in line with legal procedures. Some important improvements were noted in the operation of the various bodies and, in particular, substantial efforts were made to communicate in a more transparent manner. A detailed Manual on the new procedures for polling boards, provided by the REC for the April 2022 elections, was part of this strategy. Hybrid online and in-person training programmes for lower-level commissions, focusing on Election Day procedures, determination of election results and adjudication of complaints, were put in place. However, participation in training sessions was not made mandatory for PB members. Most political parties organised training for their own PB members, which may have contributed to misunderstandings and conflicting interpretations of procedures.

6. VOTER REGISTRATION

30. All citizens aged at least 18 years on the Election Day and permanently residing in the municipality have the right to vote in local elections, except those whose legal capacity has been deemed to be lost by a court decision. The Unified Voters' Register (UVR) is an electronic system established prior to the 2012 elections. The database is maintained by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government. Inclusion in the UVR is based on voters' permanent residence, including if they live abroad. Voters can check their status online or in local government premises and, in 2022, they could request corrections between 16 February and 30 March.

31. Voters may request mobile voting due to illness, age or disability at their respective LEC or PB, without providing a justification, until 11 am on the Election Day. Voting with an aide is also permitted for voters who request one.

32. Despite efforts from the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Congress was informed about issues persisting as regards to voters residing *de facto* abroad and the inclusion of deceased and 'phantom' voters in the voters' lists. During the campaign, concerns about the accuracy of the voter lists were raised by domestic and international commentators. For instance, ahead of the elections, voting notices were allegedly sent to the homes of deceased people²⁰. To address these concerns, in November 2021, the Government created an inter-party working group to scrutinize the UVR. However, this review did not take place prior to the April 2022 elections²¹.

33. On 1 April 2022, the REC published the final number of registered voters with 6,502,307 people listed. This compared with the 6,584,376 voters on the voter lists for the 2020 elections²². In Belgrade, 1,600,462 voters were registered. In the remaining 12 municipalities, the number of registered voters varied between 6,175 in Medveda and 40,661 in Bor.

¹⁸REC (2022) *Manual of Procedures for Polling Boards* and Law on Local Elections, Article 91.

¹⁹ For the 2022 elections, the standing composition of a polling board for the national elections was enlarged by the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, adding an additional member and deputy member nominated by the REC on the proposal of the Speaker of the National Assembly. It also included members and deputy members nominated by submitters of proclaimed electoral lists of MP candidates and nominators of proclaimed presidential candidates.

²⁰ ENEMO Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions (2022), p11 available at: <http://enemo.eu/uploads/file-manager/ENEMOStatementofPreliminaryFindingsandConclusionsSerbia2022.pdf>

²¹ See OSCE/ODIHR (2022), *op.cit.* Delay was due to 'lack of clear mandate and resources' p. 2

²² OSCE/ODIHR (2020) Special Election Assessment Mission Final Report, Serbia.

7. REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES

34. Serbian citizens eligible to vote may also stand for local elections. Candidate lists must obtain the support of 200 to 3,000 voters, depending on the number of registered voters in the municipality. A voter can only support one list. Certification can be conducted by public notaries, municipal administration and courts. According to domestic NGOs, the verification of signatures in municipalities and city administrations may lead to falsification of signatures and of seals²³.

35. Upon registration, candidate lists may request the status of candidates representing national minorities, such candidate lists are not required to reach the 3% threshold to be allocated seats in local assemblies. In this respect, the Congress delegation was informed by interlocutors about allegations in past elections regarding the misuse of minority status with political subjects trying to falsify applications to benefit from threshold exemptions.

36. Following the 2022 amendments, the law requires a minimum 40 per cent of each gender on candidate lists and prescribes that two candidates of the less represented gender be represented among every five consecutive candidates. These requirements were complied with for the 2022 elections although interlocutors of the Congress delegation pointed out some difficulties in fulfilling the gender requirements.

37. International observers concluded that, overall, candidate registration for the national elections was inclusive and transparent for the 2022 elections²⁴. However, Congress interlocutors drew attention to the short timeframe for appeals and complaints.

38. Closed lists of candidates, specifying a list leader, had to be submitted to the LEC in writing and electronically 20 days before the Election Day. For the Belgrade City Assembly, 12 lists, including 18 political parties and one group of citizens ("We Must") contested the election. In the 13 other municipalities, from four to eleven lists registered. Only the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) managed to present lists or to be part of a coalition in all 13 municipalities. Some political subjects took part in coalitions in some municipalities and ran against coalition members in other municipalities. Civic groups registered in Bajina Bašta, Belgrade, Bor, Kladovo, Kula, Lučanj, Majdanpek and Sečanj.

8. ELECTION OBSERVATION

39. Following the February 2022 amendments, the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament explicitly provides for citizen and international observation and guarantees observers unhindered access to the entire election process including the work of all three levels of election administration, in line with prior OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations.

40. Domestic organisations registered with a statutory purpose related to elections have the right to nominate observers to the REC, LECs and PBs no later than seven days prior to the elections. Identification badges are provided by the REC and polling board members have to record their presence on a specific log.

41. The 2022 elections generated huge interest in Serbia and abroad with a record number of observers (4,687 observers from 9 civil society organisations and 531 international observers from 23 organisations) being accredited by the REC without any major issues.

9. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

42. The official campaign for the local elections started on 15 February and ended with the campaign silence period (including silence on social media) which started 48 hours before the Election Day.

43. Campaigning for local elections was to a large extent overshadowed by the simultaneous campaign for parliamentary and presidential elections. Despite previous Congress recommendations in 2012 and 2016, the three elections were held on the same day. The national campaign focused

²³See CRTA, Second Preliminary Long-term observation report (2022), p.6 A representative of the Moramo list was allegedly attacked during signature collection, see OSCE/ODIHR (2022), p. 9.

²⁴OSCE/ODIHR (2022), p. 8

predominantly on the economy, employment, foreign investment, environmental protection, Serbia's foreign policy regarding the EU and NATO and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

44. Compared to elections before the Covid-19 pandemic, parties and candidates organised less rallies and gatherings and also reduced the use of basic promotional materials, in particular outside of Belgrade. Congress interlocutors referred to difficulties in gaining access to billboard space due to excessive prices and space having been purchased in advance by other contestants. At the same time, campaigning through social networks increased during the pandemic.

45. The greatest interest in the local elections was noticeable in Belgrade where the opposition expected better chances to win. Environment protests in 2021, in particular in Belgrade, led to the tangible emergence of civic movements and local debates on questions about natural resources or pollution. Consequently, campaign topics for the 2022 local elections included the Belgrade Waterfront project, traffic, the sewage system and pollution in Belgrade or employment and the cost of living in Kula.

46. Overall, the campaign was marred by allegations of pressure on public sector employees to support the incumbent and the ruling coalition, and misuse of administrative resources by state and local actors prior to the elections²⁵. The law allows most public officials to engage in political activities, including campaigning, unless it conflicts with their public duties. The law mandates the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) to determine ex officio or upon a complaint if there was a conflict between public duties and political activities of public officials. The ACA received 14 complaints against public officials and followed up on five cases²⁶. Despite public officials being prohibited from making use of public resources and official events for political purposes, notably during election campaigns, there were many allegations of abuse at local level, which, according to Congress interlocutors, were not thoroughly investigated²⁷.

47. The Law on Financing of Political Activities (LFPA) prohibits political entities from sponsoring projects of public benefit during the campaign period. Excessive budgetary allocations, offers to conduct repairs, easing the obtention of public housing or permits, and distribution of goods were among the numerous allegations heard by the Congress delegation. Congress interlocutors also raised concerns on the alleged misuse of social beneficiaries' data by political parties to intimidate or buy votes, more prominently targeting civil servants and minorities²⁸.

48. Overall, concerns over an uneven level playing field were raised by domestic and international observers as the line between ruling party and State institutions seemed repeatedly blurred during the campaign. A strong advantage was provided to lists representing the Government, in the media or by access to more economic and public resources. Oversight, sanction and investigation mechanisms remained underutilised compared to the number of allegations.

10. PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCING

49. Campaign finance is primarily regulated by the Law on Financing of Political Activities, as revised in 2022, the 2019 Law on Prevention of Corruption (last amended in 2022) and supplemented by regulations of the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA)²⁹. The revised Law on Financing of Political Activities, inter *alia* lowered donation limits, introduced interim reporting on donations and expenditures for electoral contestants and set limits on political party membership fees and loans.

50. Donations, being in kind or monetary, are limited to 10 average net monthly salaries, or RSD 746,290 (around EUR 6,350) for individuals and 30 salaries or RSD 2.24 million (around EUR 19,000) for legal entities. These amounts are doubled in election years, regardless of the number of contests. Donations from anonymous and foreign donors, public contractors, public entities, some civil servants, religious institutions, non-profit organisations and trade unions and through third parties, as well as

25 Other remarkable events during the electoral campaign included the boycott by opposition parties in the municipality of Doljevac due to perceived uneven playing field and the brief detention of an opposition candidate in Sečanj.

26 Anti-corruption Agency, press release, 31 March 2022, <https://www.acas.rs/postupanje-agencije-po-prijavama-povredezakona/>

27 CRTA (2022), Second Preliminary Long-term observation report (2022), pp. 7-8

28 See in particular about mechanisms used for vote-buying and targeting of Roma minority: CRTA (2022), Preliminary Long-term Observation report - Pressures and electoral corruption outlast the election campaign p. 8

29 Law No. 35/2019-6 On Countering Corruption

loans from non-Serbian banks are prohibited. All donations exceeding one average salary or RSD 74,629 (EUR 634) must be made through a bank transfer and reported online on the party's website. Membership fees are capped to RSD 3000 per year.

51. Annual public funding is available for the political entities that have won seats in representative bodies in proportion to the number of votes received. Funds are allocated in proportion to the number of votes received. As regards to the election campaign, 40 per cent of all funds available are distributed by local government units equally among registered lists. The 60 per cent remaining are distributed in proportion of seats received after official announcement of results. Campaign expenditures are not capped but the amount of public funds available is limited to a certain percentage of local units' budgets.

52. Among other legal obligations, candidate lists must open a separate bank account for campaign purposes and report information to the Anti-Corruption Agency on all donations/funds they receive annually, five days before Election Day and within 30 days after the proclamation of the final electoral results. In that regard, the Law does not make a distinction between parliamentary, local and provincial electoral campaigns finance and reporting. Congress interlocutors informed the delegation of many failures to submit interim reports before the five-day deadline.

53. The mandate of the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) is to oversee political finance and prevent corruption. ACA is required to verify the accuracy of the campaign reports against the attached financial documentation supplemented by the findings of its campaign observers and to publish conclusions within 120 days after the deadline for submitting the reports. It may initiate an additional audit, issue warnings, and launch misdemeanour or criminal proceedings ex officio or upon receiving complaints, leading to financial sanctions, which may include suspension of public funding or imprisonment³⁰. For the 2022 elections, the ACA deployed 130 observers around the country to monitor campaign events and material. On 1 April, the ACA stated they had initiated 15 cases on violation of campaign finance regulations based on observers' findings, out of which eight were discarded, four led to warnings and three to opening procedures.

54. The 2022 legislative amendments left a number of issues unaddressed, including those pertaining to the introduction of a campaign expenditure limit and improvement of the efficiency of the oversight mechanism. Congress interlocutors stated that technical recommendations from previous observations have been addressed but that substantive recommendations, e.g., oversight by the ACA and equality of contestants remained to be fully addressed³¹. OSCE/ODIHR reported that interlocutors expressed low confidence in the efficiency of the party and campaign finance regulations, citing legal loopholes that could be used to circumvent transparency and accountability requirements as well as deficient implementation and control³².

11. MEDIA LANDSCAPE

55. The media environment in Serbia is diverse and active but strongly polarised, between the ruling and opposition parties. Freedom of expression and of the press are enshrined in the Constitution. Reporters without Borders ranked Serbia 79/180 in the 2022 World Press Freedom Index and described a highly fragmented and politicised media environment. Most opposition interlocutors highlighted their chronic lack of access to the national public and private broadcasters to present their views.

56. Media sources include 243 television channels, 335 radio stations and 941 print media. Television remains the primary source of political information, followed by social networks and online media. There are 850 internet portals and 89 editorially designed websites³³.

57. However, despite a very high number of outlets, the media sector is polarised and offers a limited diversity of views. Many TV channels are heavily dependent on public funding, which is perceived as being predominantly distributed according to their political affiliation, leading to self-censorship. Congress interlocutors claimed that the most influential private TV channels support government

30 In addition, the State Audit Institution (SAI) is mandated to conduct an annual audit of political parties and coalitions represented in the National Assembly.

31 The Congress has repeatedly called for measures to enhance the supervision and enforcement of party and campaign finance rules and the strengthening of sanctions. See Congress reports on observation of the 2012 and 2016 Elections in Serbia.

32 OSCE/ODIHR (2022), p11

33 <https://nuns.rs/u-srbiji-140-medija-vise-nego-prosle-godine/>

politicians and follow similar editorial lines thus, de facto, reducing media independence and autonomy. Private media outlets with alternative viewpoints often do not provide an effective counterbalance, given their limited reach³⁴. Other international organisations reported numerous concerns about diminished media freedom, attacks and threats against journalists and a climate of vilification of critical voices³⁵.

58. The Law on Local Elections enshrines the right of the public to receive information about contestants in a fair and equal manner. In February 2022, the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media adopted the Rulebook on obligations of media service providers during election campaigns. The Rulebook also obliges the public media service to ensure equal and impartial coverage when reporting on election activities of the electoral lists and candidates.

59. Recent legal amendments oblige media service providers to publish advertising rates before the election campaign and apply the same prices to all contestants. It also introduced ban on media outlets from informing on opening and inauguration events that candidates attend in their capacity as public officials, within the last ten days of the campaign. Congress interlocutors indicated to the delegation that while coverage on public media was more equal and pluralistic after the 2022 amendments, there was little editorial input and a lack of critical views and analysis. Prior to the official start of the campaign, Congress interlocutors reported a dominance of government officials in the media. They mentioned a slight improvement after the official start of the campaign. However, bias in reporting and unfair scheduling of programmes allegedly persisted throughout the campaign³⁶.

60. The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) is vested with oversight of the broadcast media to ensure consistent application of the law and adjudicate media-related complaints. In response to concerns of the opposition regarding impartiality, a collegial Temporary Supervisory Authority for Media Monitoring during the election campaign (TSA) was set up by the Government in October 2021 and is constituted of representatives of the REM and the opposition. However, internal disagreements and lack of enforcement powers undermined its effectiveness³⁷.

61. Media coverage of the local elections was limited. There was no common televised debate for contestants in local elections, including for the City Assembly of Belgrade but some candidates appeared in TV programmes and debates. International observers assessed that local media outlets were mostly reactive rather than proactive in terms of reporting on elections. They also concluded that local media outlets were very limited and lacked capacity, funding and human resources³⁸. There was a high level of engagement on social media in some areas but access to broadband remains an issue in rural areas.

12. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

62. The legal framework for resolution of electoral disputes has been revised in 2022, mostly to extend timeframes in which it is possible to file a complaint. Representatives of political lists, candidates and voters may file complaints on decisions, actions and omissions, as stipulated by the Law on Local Elections, within 72 hours of the publication of the decision or the omission. All decisions must be published online. LECs are responsible for handling complaints regarding voting procedures. Appeals may be filed within 72 hours of the LEC's decision with the higher court having territorial jurisdiction over the relevant municipality or to the REC. These decisions are then final.

63. The February 2022 legislative changes enhanced the effectiveness of dispute resolution by extending legal standing to voters registered in a polling station and prolonging the timeframes for filing and reviewing complaints. Congress interlocutors welcomed the efforts made in enhancing transparency in handling complaints and were satisfied with the collegial decision-making of the extended composition of the REC.

34 ENEMO Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions (2022)

35 One journalist from a municipality near the capital informed the ODIHR EOM of threats in the run-up to the elections by persons associated with the ruling coalition, in connection with reporting on local affairs, OSCE/ODIHR Preliminary Report, 2022, *op.cit.* p13

36 See ENEMO Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, OSCE/ODIHR (2022), CRTA various reports on the 2022 elections (2022), Second Preliminary Long-term Observation Report, Preliminary Media Monitoring Report and Preliminary Long-term Observation Report.

37 OSCE/ODIHR (2022), p14

38 ENEMO, *Ibid.* pp18-19

64. In the context of the 2022 elections, eleven complaints were filed with the REC, and eight were dismissed, including five on challenging candidate registration, two opposing denial of registration and one challenged a LEC decision to establish PBs without the approval of the REC. Two complaints on decisions of the LECs were upheld. All REC decisions were appealed to the Administrative Court. Of them, the Court dismissed two on technical grounds; rejected four on merits and upheld one appeal on the minority status of the Russian Alliance Coalition³⁹. Overall, the REC reviewed complaints in open sessions, respecting due process, timelines and maintained a publicly available database.

13. ELECTION DAY

65. On Election Day, the Congress delegation was deployed in seven teams and visited about a hundred polling stations in which local as well as presidential and parliamentary elections were held concurrently. The teams visited municipalities of Belgrade, Arandjelovac, Smederevska Palanka, Kula and Sečanj covering both urban and rural locations. The delegation observed all aspects of the Election Day processes, including opening, voting, closing and counting.

66. Overall, voting was calm and transparent, and polling boards worked within a legal framework considered to be generally in line with international standards, despite some inconsistencies and irregularities. As prescribed by law, election material was available and lists displayed in the polling stations in minority languages, such as Hungarian, where relevant. In most polling stations observed, voting started on time, ballot boxes were sealed, and the first voter was invited to sign the control sheet. The different colours of ballot papers facilitated the process of voting and voters seemed overall well informed about the ID verification and inking procedures. Polling stations presidents often had previous experience and had received additional training by the REC.

67. However, several organisational problems were noted by the Congress delegation in various polling stations including lack of preparedness for the opening procedures resulting in delays; poor layout of the polling station and sealing of ballot boxes; overcrowding due to the extended composition of the polling boards, while in a few polling stations, the minimum presence of permanent commission members was not ensured; lack of awareness of the role of international observers.

68. In a small number of polling stations visited, concern was expressed by the Congress observers with regard to: the verification of the voter identity; the finger-inking process and according checks; the accuracy of the voters' list in general as well as the management of the voters queuing at the official closing time. In Belgrade in particular, voters queuing at time of closing were sometimes invited to leave the queue and were refused entry⁴⁰. In few instances, voters came to the polling stations with invitations addressed to deceased people⁴¹. Although not witnessed directly by the delegation, there were reports of disturbances in several polling stations⁴².

69. Congress observers, on several occasions, noticed infringements to the secrecy of vote due to inappropriate positioning of the screens, insufficient distance, family voting and unfolded ballot papers⁴³. Another issue was the accessibility of polling stations for people with physical disabilities and for the ageing population.

70. Overall, counting was transparent and in line with REC instructions. However, although very detailed instructions for the counting process were contained in the Manual for polling boards, the approach to counting varied considerably from one polling station to the other, possibly reflecting the uneven extent of training and experience of their members. The delegation found that in some polling stations the procedural steps were rigorously followed, in others the approach was less meticulous and

39 ENEMO Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions (2022), p23 and OSCE/ODIHR Preliminary Statement of findings and conclusions (2022) p14

40 According to CRTA, voters were queuing in 27 per cent of polling stations in Belgrade and were refused entry in 12 per cent, see c

41 Domestic NGO CRTA also raised concerns about 'phantom voters', observed the use of parallel lists of voters in 10 percent of polling stations in Belgrade and irregularities in the mobile voting process were recorded by CRTA in 9% of polling stations also in Belgrade, see CRTA Preliminary Report on Election Day (2022), p19.

42 Allegedly, the president of the pro-European opposition of the Free Citizens' Movement party (PSG), Pavle GRBOVIĆ, was beaten by an activist of the SNS, and several cases of attacks on activists of the "Moramo" coalition were also reported. The ENEMO mission was informed of cases of attacks and physical altercations in the vicinity of polling stations, violence towards candidates. See OSCE/ODIHR and ENEMO Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions (2022).

43 OSCE/ODIHR observers noted the same pattern in 27 per cent of the polling stations visited, see OSCE/ODIHR, p17

streamlined, with counting undertaken concurrently for the three votes or rushed. Minor errors in the final number of signatures, wrong additions or the process for unsealing boxes were also observed.

14. TURNOUT AND ELECTION RESULTS

71. Overall, the post-election period was marred by controversies and disputes. The process for announcing preliminary results by the REC had been modified by recent amendments and the absence of an official statement on the night following the election created some confusion⁴⁴. At national level, procedural mistakes led to the annulment of the vote in several polling stations, where the vote had to be repeated⁴⁵.

72. The national turn-out was established at 59% on the Election Day and stood at 58.6% after repeated votes. Overall, presidential and parliamentary elections led to the victory of the SNS at all levels of government. However, the SNS slightly underperformed in parliamentary elections and in key cities such as Belgrade and Novi Sad.

73. Regarding local elections, vote was annulled and repeated in six polling stations in Belgrade. The turnout for local elections varied between 52% in Kladovo, 57.2% in Belgrade and up to 78% in Doljevac.

74. In Belgrade, the post-election period was tumultuous. The United for Victory coalition, the We must "Moramo" list and other opposition coalitions alleged voter fraud and filed complaints on voters not being allowed to vote after closing time, while being in the queue, resulting in the Belgrade Election Commission organising re-voting on 16 and 21 April at six polling stations. In total, the opposition lists submitted to the Belgrade LEC 381 complaints about irregularities at the polling stations. 125 complaints on the correction of calculation errors were accepted and the results corrected by the Belgrade LEC. 264 appeals were submitted to the Administrative Court, of which only 15 were found justified⁴⁶.

75. In Belgrade, first estimates of seat allocation showed a perfect split between the SNS coalition and the opposition (55 seats each). In the aftermath of the Election Day, the opposition called for a repeated election in Belgrade at the end of the year, to which President VUČIĆ agreed. However, after repeating votes, final results for the election of members of the City Assembly Belgrade were announced by the Belgrade LEC on 9 May 2022. Seven political subjects out of twelve won seats: SNS gathered 38.02% of the votes (48 seats); United for Victory of Belgrade 21.32% (26 seats); We Must "Moramo" civic coalition 10.81% (13 seats); the Socialist Party of Serbia 6.99% (8 seats), Milos Jovanovic - Hope list 6.3% (7 seats); the Serbian Oath keepers Party "Zavetnici" 3.5% (4 seats) and the Dveri-POKS coalition 3.37% (4 seats)⁴⁷.

76. However, because of the seat allocation method (D'Hondt) which slightly favours lists that gathered most votes, the SNS was allocated a few more seats despite the opposition receiving more votes overall. Since the final announcement, it is unclear if new local elections will be called in Belgrade as the SNS and its coalition partner SPS have won 56 mandates, giving them a one-seat majority in the City Assembly. As a result, Aleksandar ŠAPIĆ (SNS) was elected mayor of Belgrade on 20 June 2022 with 57 votes, as the opposition did not take part in the vote.

77. Outside of Belgrade, local election results were announced by the competent LECs on separate dates depending on the complaints and appeals mechanism. Out of the 426 seats to fill in all remaining municipalities, the SNS won 299, the SPS 64 (except in Sevojno where it allied with the SNS) and 38 seats were allocated to civic groups, in Kladovo and Lučanj in particular. Overall, the SNS won absolute majority in local councils of Doljevac (79.9%), Knjaževac (61.2%), Kula (52.1%), Lučanj (55%), Majdanpek (55.2%), Sečanj (59.9%) and Smederevska Palanka (63.8%). SNS scored over 40% in all remaining municipalities, with the notable exception of Bor (36.4%). However, SNS-led coalitions often with the Socialist Party of Serbia, will run all 13 municipalities with comfortable majorities including in Bor, where the SNS was also joined by the Vlach Party. By early June, seven incumbent mayors, including one woman, had been re-elected.

44 CRTA Preliminary Report on Election Day (2022), p 20 and OSCE/ODIHR, p17

45 Parliamentary election was repeated in one polling station in Bujanovac on 27 May based on a complaint filed to the REC by the Socialist Party of Serbia.

46 <https://crta.rs/dokle-je-stigao-izborni-proces/>

47 <https://crta.rs/proglaseni-konacni-rezultati-za-predsednicke-i-beogradske-izbore/>

78. While the leadership of all 13 cities and municipalities will remain under the control of the SNS, these elections allowed for a number of civic groups and opposition parties to campaign and the municipal assemblies will be slightly more diverse and pluralistic.

15. CONCLUSIONS

79. The 2022 elections in Serbia were particularly significant at both national and local levels. On one hand, Aleksandar VUČIĆ's landslide victory in the presidential election strengthened his rule. On the other hand, the next National Assembly will be much more diverse than the previous one. As regards the local level, due to suppositions by commentators on a possible powershift, the vote for the City Assembly of Belgrade was not only very competitive but also the focus of public attention.

80. By and large, the Election Day was organised in a calm and transparent manner in line with norms of democratic elections in most polling stations visited by the Congress. Its delegation recognised that the outcome of the 2021 interparty dialogue and following legislative changes pertaining to registration, campaigning and Election Day processes, although hastily implemented, were a positive step forward. Overall, they aimed at increasing diversity of all political options and improving electoral procedures. At the same time, further refinement is required, in particular as regards reducing inequality between electoral contestants.

81. Regarding the overall campaign, the Congress delegation expressed concern at the widespread distrust between ruling and opposition parties and at allegations of pressure and intimidation of voters, abuse of incumbency and errors in the Unified Voters' Registers (UVR). In this respect, the delegation reiterated that reinforcing the trust of citizens in electoral processes was vital for local democracy.

82. In line with previous Congress recommendations and despite recent legislation introduced to ensure a more balanced access to the media allowing voters to make a fully informed choice, the situation of the media still needs to be highlighted as worrisome, especially against the backdrop of biased reporting, threats to journalists and prevailing self-censorship.

83. Another matter of concern for the Congress delegation remained the effectiveness of the revised oversight mechanisms and sanctions regarding campaign finance and the misuse of administrative resources.

84. As observed during previous Congress missions, the extended composition of polling boards contributed to a complex set-up of polling stations, which were mostly of small size. Hence, overcrowding in polling stations, the secrecy of the vote and accessibility and support for voters with disabilities were among the issues noticed by the Congress observers on the Election Day. In addition to the efforts already made by the authorities to provide training for the election administration, compulsory instead of voluntary training could help eliminating inconsistencies on polling day (c.f. regarding ID checks, finger inking, sealing of boxes, positioning of screens).

85. Last but not least, as stated in previous reports, the holding of local elections concurrently with presidential and parliamentary elections, diminished the significance given to the local elections and reduced media and public interest. Therefore, the Congress delegation recommended that a separate Election Day should be dedicated to local self-government to avoid the overshadowing of local democracy issues by national concerns.

APPENDIX I

ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
3 April 2022 partial local elections in Serbia
31 March – 4 April
FINAL PROGRAMME

Thursday 31 March 2022

Various times Arrival of delegation members in the country

Friday 1 April 2022

08:00 – 08:30 Morning briefing for the delegation
 Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade

08:30 – 09:10 Briefing with **Mr Tobias FLESSENKEMPER**, Head of Council of Europe Office in Belgrade
 Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade

09:30 – 10:30 Briefing with **Mr Marko JANKOVIĆ**, Deputy Chair of the Republic Electoral Commission of Serbia and **Mr Serdjan SMILJANIĆ**, Secretary.
 Venue: Kralja Milana 14, Belgrade

11:00 – 13:00 Joint briefing with IEOM (delegations from PACE, OSCE PA, European Parliament, OSCE/ODIHR)
 Venue: Metropol Palace Hotel, Bulevar kralja Aleksandra 69, 11000 Belgrade

Lunch break

14:30 – 15:30 Briefing with representatives of diplomatic corps based in Belgrade

- **H.E. Mr Adam KOENRAAD**, Ambassador of Belgium
- **H.E. Mr Yorgos DIACOFOTAKIS**, Ambassador of Greece
- **Mr Josef BROŽ**, Minister Counsellor, Head of Political Section, Embassy of the Czech Republic
- **H.E. Mr Pierre COCHARD**, Ambassador of France
- **Mr Gabriele INGROSSO**, First Secretary, Embassy of Italy
- **Ms Dorothea GIESELMANN**, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Germany
- **Ms Celia SOMMERSTEIN**, Second Secretary Political, Embassy of the United Kingdom
- **H.E. Mr Emanuele GIAUFRET**, Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia
- **H.E. Mr Jan BRAATHU**, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade

15:45 – 16:30 Briefing with the Delegation of the Republic of Serbia in the Congress

- **Ms Jelena TRIFUNOVIĆ**, Head of the Delegation, Member of the Municipal Assembly, Municipality of Svrljig
- **Mr Robert FEJSTAMER**, Member of the Delegation, President of Kanjiža Municipality
- **Ms Aleksandra VUKMIROVIĆ**, Head of the Unit for EU Integration and International Cooperation/ Secretary of the Serbian Delegation to the Congress

Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade

16:00 – 17:00	<p>Briefing for the Congress sub-delegation with representatives of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Aleksandar MARKOVIĆ, Head of unit, Civil records and registers • Ms Iva BOJIĆIĆ, Head of unit, Political parties and registers • Mr Sasa MOGLIĆ, Head of unit, Local self-government <p>Venue: 6, Bircaninova Street, Belgrade</p>
16:45 – 17:30	<p>Briefing with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Nikola TARBUK, Secretary General • Mr Marko TOMAŠEVIĆ, Deputy Secretary General • Ms Aleksandra VUKMIROVIĆ, Head of the Unit for EU Integration and International Cooperation/ Secretary of the Serbian Delegation to the Congress • Mr Novak GAJIĆ, Head of Department for Political System of Local Self-Government <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>
17:30 – 18:00	<p>Debriefing</p> <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>

Saturday 2 April 2022

09:30 – 10:00	<p>Morning briefing for the delegation</p> <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>
10:00 – 11:00	<p>Briefing with representatives of NGOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Pavle DIMITRIJEVIĆ, Deputy Programme Director, Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) • Mr Bojan KLAČAR, Executive Director, and Mr Ivo ČOLOVIĆ, Programme Director, Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) • Mr Zlatko MINIĆ, Coordinator of campaign monitoring, Transparency Serbia <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>
11:15 – 12:15	<p>Briefing with representatives of the media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Zoran STANOJEVIĆ, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Information Programme, Radio and Television of Serbia (RTS) • Mr Vojislav STEFANOVIĆ, Executive Producer and TV anchor, N1 <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>
Lunch break	
14:00 – 14:30	<p>Briefing with Mr Vladimir OBRADOVIĆ, candidate and number 2 on the list of the Coalition “United to win” in Belgrade</p> <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>
14:45 – 15:15	<p>Briefing with Mr Dobrica VESELINOVIĆ, candidate for the Mayor of Belgrade on the list of Green coalition “We must”</p> <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>
15:30 – 16:00	<p>Briefing with Mr Marko ŽIVKOVIĆ, Deputy Secretary General of the Social Democrats of Serbia</p> <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>
16:15 – 16:45	<p>Briefing with Mr Vladimir ORLIĆ, Vice-President of the Serbian Progressive Party, former member of the Belgrade City Assembly.</p> <p>Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade</p>

16:45 – 17:15	Internal technical briefing for the delegation Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade
17:15 – 17:45	Technical briefing with drivers and interpreters Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade
17:45 – 18:00	Debriefing Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Exhibition Hall, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade

Sunday 3 April 2022

06:30	Deployment of Congress teams from Belgrade to the polling stations (See “Deployment plan”)
23:00	Late night de-briefing Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade

Monday 4 April 2022

Various times	Departure of some members of the Congress Delegation
12:00	Press conference of the Congress Delegation Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Mediterranean & Adriatic room, Vladimira Popovica 10, Belgrade
15:30	IEOM Press conference (PACE, OSCE PA, European Parliament, OSCE/ODIHR) Venue: Metropol Palace Hotel, Bulevar kralja Aleksandra 69, 11000 Belgrade

Tuesday 5 April 2022

Various times	Departure of some members of the Congress Delegation
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DELEGATION

Ms Carla DEJONGHE, Head of Delegation, Belgium (ILDG, R)
Ms Aikatherini ADAMOPOULOU, Greece (EPP/CCE, R)
Mr Zdenek BROZ, Czech Republic (ILDG, L)
Mr Xavier CADORET, France (SOC/G/PD, L)
Ms Belinda GOTTARDI, Italy (SOC/G/PD, L)
Ms Tanja JOONA, Finland (ILDG, L)
Mr Heiner KLEMP, Germany (SOC/G/PD, R)
Mr Shabir PANDOR, United Kingdom (SOC/G/PD, R)
Ms Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE, Georgia (EPP/CCE, L)
Mr Emin YERITSYAN, Armenia (EPP/CCE, L)

Expert

Ms Brid QUINN, Member of the Congress Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-government

Congress Secretariat

Ms Renate ZIKMUND, Head of the Department of Statutory Activities
Mr Adam DRNOVSKY, Election Observation Officer
Ms Mathilde GIRARDI, Election Observation Officer
Ms Martine ROUDOLFF, Assistant, Local and Regional Election Observation

APPENDIX II

CONGRESS ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
3 April 2022 Municipal elections in Serbia
Draft DEPLOYMENT PLAN

Congress teams	Area of deployment
<p>Team 1</p> <p>Ms Carla DEJONGHE, Head of Delegation Ms Belinda GOTTARDI Ms Renate ZIKMUND</p> <p>Interpreter: Matija VUJOVIĆ - English Driver: Predrag MILOSAVLJEVIC</p>	<p>Belgrade – North Београд</p> <p>1,166,763 inhabitants</p> <p>Palilula, Zemun, Surcin, Novi Beograd, Stari Grad, Vracar</p> <p>Палилула, Земун, Сурчин, Нови Београд, Стари град, Врачар</p>
<p>Team 2</p> <p>Ms Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE Ms Tanja JOONA</p> <p>Interpreter: Jelisaveta TASEV - English Driver: Predrag DJORDJEVIC</p>	<p>Belgrade – South Београд</p> <p>Zvezdara, Grocka, Vozdovac, Sopot, Mladenovac</p> <p>Звездара, Гроцка, Вождовац, Сопот, Младеновац</p>
<p>Team 3</p> <p>Mr Heiner KLEMP Ms Martine ROUDOLFF</p> <p>Interpreter: Tatjana TERZIĆ- English Driver: Nebojsa COSI</p>	<p>Belgrade – West Београд</p> <p>Obrenovac, Lazarevac, Barajevo, Cukarica, Rakovica, Savski Venac</p> <p>Обреновац, Лазаревац, Барајево, Чукарица, Раковица, Савски венац</p>
<p>Team 4</p> <p>Mr Zdenek BROZ Mr Adam DRNOVSKY</p> <p>Interpreter: Veljko DJURIČIĆ- English Driver: Bojan MATOVIC</p>	<p>Arandelovac (1) Аранђеловац</p> <p>46,225 inhabitants</p> <p>1 hour drive</p>
<p>Team 5</p> <p>Mr Shabir PANDOR Ms Brid QUINN, expert</p> <p>Interpreter: Petar KRŠIKAPA - English Driver: Milos DJILAS</p>	<p>Smederevska Palanka (2) Смедеревска Паланка</p> <p>50,284 inhabitants</p> <p>1 hour drive</p>

Team 6 Mr Xavier CADORET Ms Mathilde GIRARDI Interpreter Marija VLAJKOVIC - French Driver: Aleksandar KARBINSKI	Kula (8) Кула 43,101 inhabitants 1,5 hour drive
Team 7 Ms Aikatherini ADAMOPOULOU Mr Emin YERITSYAN Interpreter: Stefan STOŠIĆ English Driver: Nikola ZUBOVIC	Sečanj (11) Сечањ 13,267 inhabitants 1,5 hour drive

APPENDIX III

PRESS RELEASE

ELECTIONS STRASBOURG, FRANCE 4 APRIL 2022

Serbia: Council of Europe Congress delegation recommends to conduct local elections separately from elections at the national level

A 15-member delegation from the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe](#), led by Carla Dejonghe (Belgium, ILDG), carried out a mission to observe the partial local elections held on 3 April 2022, in Belgrade and several other municipalities.

On Election Day, seven Congress teams were deployed to Belgrade, Arandelovac, Smederevska Palanka, Kula and Secanj to monitor the procedures, from opening to closing, in about hundred polling stations. Except some inconsistencies and irregularities, overall, voting was calm and conducted by the boards in the polling stations based on a legal framework considered as generally in line with international standards.

However, at a press conference held in Belgrade on 4 April, Ms. Dejonghe raised several recurring issues, already highlighted in the [2016 Congress report](#). Polling stations were often overcrowded due to the permanent and extended composition of the polling boards, while the minimum presence of permanent members was not always ensured. The Serbian authorities should optimise the management of polling stations, ensuring, at the same time, transparent monitoring of the elections by party observers, she said.

The Head of delegation also called to further develop the training of poll workers with the aim of professionalising them. In order to strengthen the secrecy of the vote, proper polling booths should be introduced instead of cardboard separations. It is also urgent to improve the accessibility of the polling stations for people with disabilities, Ms Dejonghe stressed.

Furthermore, the Congress delegation witnessed, on several occasions, situations where voters came to the polling stations with invitations addressed to deceased people. "The existence of so-called phantom voters on the voters' lists continues to undermine public trust and confidence in elections and in democracy," warned Ms Dejonghe, calling for an independent audit of the voters' lists and better coordination between the authorities responsible for updating civil status.

Due to the simultaneous holding of three elections in Belgrade and 12 other municipalities on the same day, voter turnout was high in some places and led to long queues, especially before the polls closed. "The conduct of concurrent elections for different levels of government should be avoided in the future, and a separate Election Day should be dedicated for local and regional self-government to avoid that Presidential or Parliamentary elections overshadow local issues," Ms Dejonghe stressed.

"The fact that - following cross-party dialogue facilitated by the European Parliament last year - the opposition, at all levels of government, took part in yesterday's elections, is a positive sign and gives us confidence that Serbia can achieve greater democracy – the local government level is the ideal starting point to do so," concluded the Head of the Congress delegation.

The deployment on polling day was preceded by preparatory meetings on 1 and 2 April with representatives of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Republic Electoral Commission, members of the Serbian delegation to the Congress, the Secretary General of the Standing Conference of Cities and Municipalities, the diplomatic corps, NGOs, the media and the IEOM as well as with candidates and representatives of parties/lists running in the Belgrade election.