

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



Chamber of Local Authorities

17th PLENARY SESSION

CPL(17)5

21 September 2009

First elections of the Mayor of Yerevan, Armenia (31 May 2009)

Bureau of the Congress

Rapporteur: Nigel MERMAGEN, United Kingdom (L, ILDG)¹

A. Draft Recommendation	2
B. Explanatory Memorandum	4

Summary

Following the official invitation from the Armenian authorities to observe the first election of the mayor of Yerevan on Sunday 31 May 2009, the Congress appointed an observer delegation, headed by Nigel Mermagen, Councillor in South Somerset District Council and Rapporteur to the Congress. The delegation was composed of nine members of the Congress and four members of the European Union's Committee of the Regions, assisted by the Congress Secretariat.

The delegation concluded that the organisational framework of the elections had been broadly in compliance with European standards. However, the delegation made clear that democracy does not only depend on a proper organisational framework but on highly-developed electoral conduct and democratic culture. Also, the delegation regretted those malpractices which tempered the normal conduct of the vote. It found that the political actors in Armenia should strive for a higher standard of ethics, attitudes and behaviour and that citizens should be better aware of democratic rights and duties.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



A. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION²

1. *The Congress of Local and Regional authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:*

a. the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution (2000)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 (ECLSG) which was ratified by Armenia on 25 January 2002 and entered into force in that country on 1 May 2002;

c. Resolution 167 (2003) on local democracy in Armenia adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 26 November 2003;

d. previous reports on the elections observed in Armenia as well as Recommendation 255 (2008) on the local elections of 28 September in Armenia.

2. The Congress underlines its role in the observation of local and regional elections.

3. The Congress is satisfied with the positive developments in local democracy that have occurred in Armenia since the adoption of Recommendation 255 (2008) of the Congress on the observation of local elections on 28 September 2008. In particular, the Congress is pleased with the fact that – as it has been requested by the Congress – the Mayor of Yerevan, previously appointed by the President of Armenia, has been elected for the first time in conformity with Article 3 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

4. Also, the Congress notes that the overall organisation of the elections on 31st May 2009 has been broadly carried out in compliance with the general principles of the Council of Europe, as well as European and international principles for democratic elections.

5. In the same context, the Congress welcomes the adoption, on 19 June 2009, by the Armenian National Assembly, of the general amnesty proposed by the President of the Republic leading to the release of all persons deprived of their liberty in relation to the events of 1 and 2 March 2008 who have either not been charged with violent crimes or were not sentenced to prison terms of more than 5 years. For other cases, the sentences that have yet to be enforced will be reduced by half.

6. *Nevertheless, the Congress regrets to note that:*

a. the public at large in Armenia seems to remain deeply sceptical about the electoral process and its outcome which is rooted in different factors, such as the convergence between the political class and the business world in Armenia, a high level of corruption and a general trend of consolidation of the authoritarian rule;

b. this has led to a general feeling of frustration and indifference vis-à-vis the election result which is considered as "predetermined";

² Preliminary draft recommendation approved by the Bureau of the Congress on 21 September 2009.

Members of the Bureau:

Y. Mildon, President of the Congress, *I. Micallef (President ad interim of the Congress and President of the Chamber of Local Authorities), L. Sfirloaga (President of the Chamber of Regions), D. Suica, G. Krug, A. Knape, S. Rihtniemi, H. Zach, I. Borbely, J.-C. Frécon, S. Orlova, F. Pellegrini, K. Andersen, E. Yeritsyan, I. Michas, O. Van Veldhuizen, N. Romanova.*

N.B.: The names of members who took part in the vote are in italics.

Secretariat of the Bureau: D. Rios, L. Taesch

c. generally speaking, the electoral campaign was marked by the absence of a normal competitive climate between political parties, there were few or no visual signs of an ongoing campaign, there was hardly any recognisable difference regarding programmes and policies of the candidates and there was a scarcity of concrete city projects suggested;

d. regardless of previous assertions, relatively few female candidates stood for election.

7. Concerning the media, the Congress notes that there were still difficulties in accessing broadcasting time on public TV because of restricted and very expensive airtime. With regard to television – the most important source of information in Armenia – the lack of TV pluralism remains a point of concern as it constitutes a constraint for the development of democratic awareness amongst citizens.

8. The Congress considers that the presence of domestic observers and candidates' representatives is a positive signal for the electoral process, although too many people without a clear role were lingering inside and outside of some of the polling stations, thus disrupting the voting and vote counting; there was also a police presence in some polling stations or adjacent to them.

9. The Congress is worried about the fact that the meetings with political actors, the international community, the local civil society and media representatives have shown that many still have doubts about the electoral process which was presented as "fair and transparent" by the government and by the authorities despite the claims of extensive irregularities brought forward by the opposition and by different observers.

10. The Congress takes also note that a large number of polling stations remain inaccessible to persons with disabilities and present difficulties of access for the elderly; also, some polling stations were poorly adapted to hosting a large number of people.

11. *Taking into account the previous comments, the Congress invites the Armenian authorities to take all the necessary steps:*

a. to continue the reform process so as to lead to fair, transparent and genuinely democratic elections, notably by a critical review of the composition and the working methods at all electoral commissions' levels, by introducing effective fraud prevention measures (e.g. the inking of voters' fingers) and a transparent post-electoral analysis of violations;

b. to enhance the development of competitive election programmes and policies by an increase of active civil involvement and the strengthening of the role of the opposition;

c. to improve media pluralism, in particular concerning television, and thus executing the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case concerning the denial of a broadcasting licence to the television channel A1 + in the interest of the strengthening of a democratic awareness building process;

d. to map out an inclusive strategy – involving further legislative reforms as well as awareness raising campaigns promoting "clean elections" – to fight political corruption and make elections more transparent;

e. to promote the participation of women in political life and to support their participation as candidates in local elections;

f. to clearly define the role of domestic observers by introducing measures to strictly specify the persons authorised to be present during voting and counting procedures;

g. to make efforts with regard to the further improvement of the access to and the equipment of polling stations and the handling of the ballots.

12. *Furthermore, the Congress:*

a. declares its willingness to support and assist the Armenian authorities in their efforts to implement the above recommendations with a view to the tangible consolidation of local democracy in the country, in accordance with Armenia's commitments under the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

b. asks the Committee of Ministers to take note of the present recommendation and its explanatory memorandum, and to transmit it to the relevant bodies in the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe, to the Venice Commission, the Directorate General of Democracy and Political Affairs, the GRECO Group and the Commissioner for Human Rights;

c. invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of the above recommendations in its procedures for monitoring Armenia's commitments and undertakings.

B. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

I. Introduction

1. Following an official invitation from the authorities of the Republic of Armenia to observe the first municipal elections in Yerevan on Sunday 31 May 2009, the Bureau of the Congress responded positively.

2. The delegation, headed by Mr Nigel Mermagen (UK, ILDG), was composed of members of the Congress and of the European Union's Committee of the Regions, and accompanied by representatives of the Congress secretariat. The Congress delegation was the only international mission to monitor the elections of 31 May.

3. Already on 4 and 5 May a pre-election mission explored the situation in the Armenian capital city of Yerevan.

4. The Congress delegation would particularly like to thank Mr Emin Yeritsyan, Head of the delegation of Armenia to the Congress, and President of Communities Association of Armenia and his staff, for their support, assistance and cooperation with regard to preparing the political and practical aspects of the two missions.

5. The Congress also wishes to express its thanks to Ms Silvia Zehe, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and her staff, for their assistance.

II. Pre-election mission

6. Given the importance of Yerevan (the city comprises more than one third of Armenia's population and concentrates roughly 50% of Armenia's economic activity) and taking into account that – not least after long-standing endeavours of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – elections were organised for the first time to vote for the City Council and, as a consequence, for the Mayor of Yerevan, the Congress decided to carry out a pre-election mission on 4 and 5 May.

7. The delegation was composed of 3 Congress members - Congress Vice-President Fabio Pellegrini (Italy, SOC), Michel Guégan (France, NR) and Nigel Mermagen (UK, ILDG). Two members of the Congress secretariat accompanied the pre-election delegation.

8. They met with representatives of the government and of electoral bodies, with city officials and with candidates from most of the political factions, as well as with NGO representatives and the media. In addition, the delegation exchanged views with a group of Ambassadors of European and non-European countries.

9. At the end of the pre-election mission the Congress members expressed the concern that the institutional and political role of the Mayor of Yerevan was in danger of being sidelined by the harsh confrontation between the political factions which are in power and the opposition. The Congress delegates referred to their meetings with different interlocutors, who informed them about threats to the proper conduct of these elections, in particular in respect of the registration and mobilisation of voters, the counting of the votes and media objectivity. The members of the Congress delegation were also worried that the real needs of the population of Yerevan could be brushed aside because of this antagonistic confrontation. Nonetheless, the Congress delegation voiced confidence in the Armenian authorities and encouraged them to take measures for the correct and proper conduct of the municipal elections.

III. Election observation mission

10. The actual election observation mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities was carried out from 28 May to 1 June 2009.

11. In the days preceding the elections, the delegation met with Mr Armen Gevorgyan, Minister for Territorial Administration and Vice-Prime Minister of Armenia, and with Mr Garegin Azaryan, Head of the Central Electoral Commission. As a follow-up to the Congress pre-election mission, further encounters with candidates running for the post of Mayor of Yerevan were scheduled. The delegation received feedback on latest developments of the election campaign from representatives of the media (private and state media), from NGOs representatives and from Ambassadors.

12. The Congress would like to thank all those listed in the programmes for the useful information provided and for their readiness to answer the questions of the delegation. The final programmes are set out in Appendix III.

13. The delegation was composed of the following members:

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe

Nigel Mermagen, Councillor, South Somerset District Council (United Kingdom, ILDG, L) – Head of Delegation/Rapporteur

Paolo Rondelli, Municipal Councillor of San Marino (San Marino, SOC, L)

Mariacristina Spinosa, Councillor, Regione Piemonte (Italy, SOC, R)

Clotilde Tascon Mennetrier, Vice-President of the General Council of Ile-et-Vilaine (France, SOC, L)

Istvan Borbely, Member of the General Assembly of Fejér County (Hungary, EPP/CD, R)

Mihkel Juhkami, Chair, Rakvere City Council (Estonia, EPP/CD, L)

Joachim Smyla, Head of the County of Lubliniec (Poland, EPP/CD, L)

Jean-Louis Testud, Deputy Mayor of Suresnes (France, EPP/CD, L)

Michel Guégan, Mayor of La Chapelle-Caro (France, NR, L)

EU Committee of the Regions

Uno Silberg, Vice-President of Committee of the Regions (Estonia, UEN-EA)

Jozef Chabert, Member of the Brussels Regional Parliament (Belgium, EPP)

Väino Hallikmägi, Member of the Council of Pärnu (Estonia, ALDE)

Congress Secretariat

Antonella Cagnolati, Director of the Congress

Renate Zikmund, Head of the Division of Communication, International Relations and Election Observation

Nioucha Ziaemoghadam, Assistant of the Division of Communication, International Relations and Election Observation

IV. Electoral procedure and regulations

14. Local administration in Armenia is based on three main texts: the Constitution, adopted by referendum in July 1995 and amended in 2005, the Law on Local Self-Government of May 2002 and the new Law on the City of Yerevan adopted in December 2008.

15. According to the first Constitution adopted in 1995, the City of Yerevan had the status of a region and its Mayor, like the Governors of the other 10 regions of the country, was appointed by the President or by the Prime Minister. After the amendments to the Constitution made in November 2005, the City of Yerevan was given the status of a community, bringing with it the necessity of electing the Mayor. The importance of the democratic election of the Mayor of Yerevan - and the election of a City Council - has already been formulated by the Congress, in particular in previous recommendations, such as the 2003 Monitoring Report on Local Democracy (Recommendation 140(2003)).

16. Both during the pre-election mission as well as during the observation mission, the Congress delegation welcomed the fact, that for the first time, members of the Yerevan City Council and, indirectly, the Mayor of Yerevan were to be elected by Armenian voters. Given the size of Yerevan's population, this is undoubtedly an important step towards strengthening local democracy in Armenia.

17. Under the new Law on the City of Yerevan adopted in December 2008, the Mayor of Yerevan is elected by all members of the City Council for four years.

18. According to its article 44, the election of the Mayor is held at the first meeting of the newly elected Municipal Council. If, following the municipal elections, one party has raised more than 50% of the seats on the board, the head of the party list is considered by the force of law as elected Mayor.

19. If the leader of the party list does not meet the qualifications for the mayor or if the party decides not to appoint him/her to the post or if, following the municipal elections, no party has raised more than 50% of seats, the mayor is elected by secret ballot.

20. The electoral code establishes a three-tier system for election administration in Armenia: the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) at State level, 41 Territorial Electoral Commissions at community level and 1923 Precinct Electoral Commissions. The Central Electoral Commission and the Territorial Electoral Commissions are permanent bodies, while the Precinct Electoral Commissions are constituted for each election.

21. The Precinct Electoral Commissions are composed of 8 members: 5 members are nominated by the five political parties present in the Parliament, 2 members are designated by the Council of the Republic of Armenia Courts and one member is appointed by the Central Electoral Commission.

22. On 11 May 2009, the Central Electoral Commission made changes to its previous decisions repealing the procedure of including non-registered citizens into electoral registers for the May 31 elections. This was based on the decision of 8 May by the Constitutional Court that non-registered residents could not vote in municipal elections.

V. Campaign and media coverage

23. Although the official election campaign was launched on 1 May 2009, the Congress observers were surprised by the fact that both during the pre-election mission and the actual observation mission there were few visual signs of a lively election campaign (e.g. hardly any posters) in the streets of Yerevan. Also, the delegation found it difficult to identify substantial differences between the competing parties and alliances in terms of policies or programmes. Moreover, throughout its different meetings with the candidates of the political parties and alliances, the delegation noticed the absence of comprehensive municipal programmes, including concrete projects for the city.

24. During the pre-election mission the Congress delegation met, amongst other media representatives, with Mesrop Movsisyan, the Director of the "A1 +" company, who described the situation for State independent media in Armenia nowadays as more difficult than before. Referring to the municipal campaign on TV and radio, he stressed that it was expensive to buy airtime and that free airtime was available only at unpopular times (between 5 and 6 pm). According to Mr Movsisyan, this was an advantage for the candidates of the ruling coalition who had easy access to the audio-visual media all day long.

25. . During the election observation mission Boris Navasardyan, the President of the Yerevan Press Club, presented to the Congress delegation the results of a monitoring of 7 TV channels in Armenia during the first two stages of coverage of the Yerevan election campaign. He confirmed that the campaign was quite calm and that – with the exception of some cases of use of force against members of the opposition – everything seemed to be running smoothly. The first stage of monitoring included the period of 16 April to 1 May (before the official start of the election campaign) and showed that the overall media coverage of the campaign was mainly neutral, although with a clear advantage in terms of airtime for top candidates of those parties that controlled or even owned audio-visual media (e.g. Tigran Karapetyan, candidate for the "People's Party" was 44,372 seconds on air – compared to 6,057 seconds airtime for Gagik Beglaryan, the incumbent Mayor of Yerevan).

26. With regard to the second stage of media monitoring (2 May to 15 May), the Yerevan Press Club also observed that the vast majority of references made to candidates were neutral. If there were negative references towards candidates, they were brought forward by participants of round tables or other discussions, not by the journalists. According to Boris Navasardyan, contrary to previous elections in Armenia, the State controlled media were not instructed by the authorities to discredit the opposition in respect of the 31 May elections.

27. All in all, the media climate seemed to have improved this time and the parties, alliances and candidates had better chances than during previous election campaigns to reach voters through the audio-visual media. Also, opposition candidates were invited to use media opportunities, in particular interviews and discussions.

28. With regard to public meetings and rallies, there were cases of physical violence against opposition activists and several complaints by the ANC opposition alliance to the Yerevan authorities for having been refused to hold pre-election meetings.

VI. Congress observations on polling day

29. The Congress delegation was divided in seven teams which covered six different districts. At the beginning of the day, the deployment of teams was as follows:

Malatia-Sebastia district: Mr Nigel Mermagen (United Kingdom, ILDG, L) and Ms Antonella Cagnolati (Congress Secretariat, Director of the Congress)

Nor Nork District and Malatia-Sebastia district: Mr Istvan Borbely (Hungary, EPP/CD, R) and Mr Joachim Smyla (Poland, EPP/CD, L)

Nork Marash district: Ms Renate Zikmund (Congress Secretariat, Head of the Division of Communication, International Relations and Election Observation) and Mr Väino Hallikmägi (Estonia, COR)

Avan district: Mr Paolo Rondelli (San Marino, SOC, L) and Ms Mariacristina Spinosa (Italy, SOC, R)

Shengavit district: Mr Mihkel Juhkami (Estonia, EPP/CD, L) and Mr Uno Silberg, (Estonia, COR)

Kentron district: Ms Clotilde Tascon Mennetrier (France, SOC, L), Mr Jozef Chabert (Belgium, COR), Ms Nioucha Ziaemoghadam (Congress Secretariat, Division of Communication, International Relations and Election Observation)

Kentron district: Mr Jean-Louis Testud (France, EPP/CD, L) and Michel Guegan (France, NR, L).

30. The polling stations were open from 8 am until 8 pm. The Congress teams observed opening procedures as well as closing and counting sessions in different polling stations. In relation to the developments and observations during polling day, the teams decided to inspect certain polling stations twice or to add specific precincts to their observation programme.

31. By the end of the day the seven teams had visited more than 120 polling stations in Yerevan. Amongst the incidents, Congress delegation members noticed themselves, were the following malpractices:

- voters tried to vote in different polling stations several times
- some proxies and observers present in polling stations did not know to which party or organisation they belonged
- ballots were stored already on the eve of election day in the polling stations and kept in safes which could not be controlled by proxies and observers
- polling stations were provided with 3% more ballots than voters registered
- family and group voting was facilitated by public transport (e.g. public buses did not stop along their routes but in front of polling stations) and by organised mini-buses
- the presence of two or three persons in the voting booth (this was explained by failing eyesight of the person who was supposed to vote)
- opposition journalists were intimidated and hindered in their work, they reported to Congress observers of having been beaten up
- also, there were unidentified groups of people hanging around in and in front of polling stations creating a tense atmosphere.

VII. Intimidations, violations, fraud

32. Despite the improved media climate and noticeable improvements in respect of the overall organisation of the 31 May elections in Yerevan – in particular, in comparison to the local elections which took place in September 2008 – the Congress members were concerned by those deficiencies in the conduct of the vote which they observed themselves and which were repeatedly reported to them by different interlocutors.

33. In the run-up to the elections, the delegation became aware of serious malpractices including intimidation (threats that citizens would suffer negative consequences for their business or fiscal disadvantages if they would not vote for a specific party). Furthermore, the delegation received information that the Defence Ministry had instructed the heads of military units to give order to soldiers and their families for the participation in the Yerevan elections. In addition, there was the question of manipulated electoral lists (by registration of voters who had registered in Yerevan only recently or by falsified documents) and of rigged vote counts (by taking away or adding votes to specific candidates). Also, the problem of mass stuffing of ballot boxes remains an issue in Armenia.

34. On voting day, members of the delegation themselves witnessed intimidation of party proxies and observers (unidentified persons entered polling stations and forced party proxies to leave the room). Moreover, voters were seen to be voting several times, or announcing openly for which candidate they were going to vote.

35. Such occurrences which clearly constitute a grave violation of Council of Europe standards were observed in different electoral precincts - but particularly in Yerevan's Malatia-Sebastia district.

36. Based on observations and reports received, the impression of the delegation during both, pre-electoral and electoral observation period was that the electoral situation in Armenia reflects a general problem of an underdeveloped democratic culture in the country. In this respect, vote-buying – which is described as a well-known “practice” in Armenia – constitutes a major problem and is symptomatic of the situation as a whole. Reportedly, voter bribes can amount to 10.000 drams (20 Euro) in Armenia.

VIII. Election results and follow-up

37. According to the results announced by the Central Electoral Commission, the turnout was approximately 53%.

38. The number of participating voters was 404,634, with a number of valid ballots of 393,516.

39. The number of ballots cast was:

- for Republican Party: 186,630 (47.43%)
- for “Prosperous Armenia” Party: 89,131 (22.65%)
- for “Armenian National Congress” Alliance: 69,140 (17.57%)
- for “Country of Law” Party: 20,106 (5.11%)
- for Armenian Revolutionary Federation: 18,094 (4.60%)
- for People's Party: 8,479 (2.15%)
- for Labor Socialist Party of Armenia: 1,936 (0.49%)

40. As it was the case in previous elections in Armenia, due to the reports of election observers, the media and based on complaints lodged by opposition parties, a recounting of the results in several precincts was carried out. There was the acknowledgement of irregularities and fraud in some areas by the Yerevan authorities who took measures to respond to these allegations. According to the chairman of Armenia's Central Election Commission (CEC), problems occurred in 18 out of 439 precincts.

41. In accordance with paragraph 4 of Article 40 of the Electoral Code, in case of invalidation of voting results in a precinct, all available materials shall be forwarded to the Prosecutor's Office for opening a criminal case. Consequently, on 4 June 2009 the Central Electoral Commission forwarded to the Prosecutor's Office the decisions of the 7th and 8th Territorial Electoral Commissions on voting results invalidation in precincts N 7/7, 7/9 and 8/15, bags of electoral documents of precincts N 7/7, 7/9 and 8/15 and the registers of the commissions.

42. On 16 June 2009, the Malatia-Sebastia Community Court started the first hearing on election fraud in connection with the municipal elections of 31 May. In this respect, Armen Ohanyan and Norik Eghiazaryan - charged under Article 150 of the Criminal Code (falsification of election or voting results) - were sentenced to three years in prison in connection with vote rigging at the Malatia Sebastia Community during municipal elections in Yerevan on 31 May.

43. The members of the Congress observation delegation appreciate the measures taken by the Armenian authorities in order to address the problems which occurred on election day. This was a signal that those who try to erode the democratic rules and procedures will be prosecuted and punished. However, as already expressed in a first reaction after the municipal elections on 1 June 2009, the Congress observation delegation is convinced that democracy does not only depend on an organisational framework of elections which the delegation considers to have been broadly in compliance with European standards.

44. Besides the need to further strengthen the legal system in Armenia - particularly in terms of further boosting electoral reform -, there is also the necessity to improve the electoral conduct and culture.

IX. Conclusion

45. The Congress delegation welcomes the fact that, for the first time since Armenia's independence, the citizens of Yerevan had the opportunity to vote for their City Council – and as a consequence – for the Mayor. With regard to the overall organisation of these elections as well as related to the improved media climate, the delegation noted a considerable step forward, particularly in comparison to the local elections which took place in Yerevan in September 2008.

46. Based on their own impressions and due to numerous reports, statements and materials collected by other observers and interlocutors, the Congress members are aware of the imperfections that surrounded the Yerevan elections on 31 May 2009 and concerned by the deficiencies in the conduct of the vote. It was and is not the intention of the observation mission to pass a general judgement. This would neither help those forces in Armenia who have been fighting for years, side by side with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, for the strengthening of local democracy in this Council of Europe member country – nor would it be in the interest of the Armenian people. This was the reason why the first assessment of the Congress delegation after the elections on 1 June 2009 was evenly balanced.

47. Nonetheless, the overall message of the Congress delegation remains unchanged: Democracy is not only about the organisational framework of elections. It is about electoral conduct and culture. Elections have to be clear, fair and transparent in the polling stations and even beyond. In this respect, it is essential to achieve a higher standard of ethics, attitudes and behaviour amongst politicians. Concrete progress is required with regard to the working methods of political parties and electoral bodies. It is also crucial to raise awareness amongst citizens of democratic rights and duties. A real democratic dialogue involving citizens at all relevant stages has to be initiated through diversified information and participation programmes.

Appendix I: Programme

Municipal elections observation mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in Yerevan, Armenia, from 27 May to 2 June 2009

Wednesday, 27 May 2009

Arrival of the delegation at Yerevan International Airport.

Thursday , 28 May 2009

09h00: Briefing by Head of delegation, Nigel MERMAGEN
Venue: Mariott Hotel

10h00: Meeting with Mr Garegin AZARYAN, Head of the Central Electoral Commission
Venue: Office of Central Electoral Commission

11h00: Meeting with Mr Levon TER-PETROSYAN (Armenian National Congress)
meeting in his capacity as former President of the Republic of Armenia
Venue: Office of the First President of the Republic of Armenia

13h00: Meeting with Mr Armen GEVORGYAN, Minister for Territorial Administration and Vice-Prime
Minister of Armenia
Venue: Government of Republic of Armenia

15h30: Round table discussion with representatives of all parties that nominated candidates for the
elections
Venue: Marriott Hotel

17h00: Meeting with Ms Heghine BISHARYAN (Country of Law Party) - only female candidate
(meeting scheduled for the pre-election mission was cancelled);
Venue: Marriott Hotel

Friday , 29 May 2009

08h30: Breakfast briefing with Boris NAVASARDYAN, President of the Yerevan Media Club
Venue: Marriott Hotel

10h00: Meeting with representatives of Heritage Party
(opposition party without candidate for the municipal elections)
Venue: Mariott Hotel

11h00: Round table discussion with media representatives (private and state media)
Venue: Marriott Hotel

14h00: Round table with NGO's
Venue: Marriott Hotel

Technical briefing for the Congress observation delegation
Venue: Marriott Hotel

16h30: Meeting with Ambassadors
Venue: Marriott Hotel

Sunday, 31 May 2009

Yerevan Municipal Elections

Monday, 1 June 2009

10h00 – 12h00: De-briefing and preparation of the Press Release

12h30: Press Conference of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
Venue: Marriott Hotel



Appendix II: Media Advisory

Media Advisory

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Communication Division

Ref: 065(2009)

Tel. +33 (0)3 90 21 49 36

Fax +33 (0)3 88 41 27 51

Internet: www.coe.int/congress

e-mail: congress.com@coe.int

47 member States

Albania
Andorra
Armenia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Georgia
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Moldova
Monaco
Montenegro
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russia
San Marino
Serbia
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
"The former Yugoslav
Republic of
Macedonia"
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom

Congress to observe municipal election in Yerevan, Armenia

Dates: 27 May – 1 June 2009

Place: Yerevan (Armenia)

Description: A delegation of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities will observe the first municipal elections in Yerevan, Armenia, on 31 May. The Congress delegation will be headed by Nigel Mermagen, (UK, ILDG). As part of the co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union, the delegation will include three members of the EU Committee of the Regions.

Prior to the election day, the delegation will meet with Armen Gevorgyan, Minister for Territorial Administration and Vice-Prime Minister of Armenia and Garegin Azaryan, Head of the Central Electoral Commission. As a follow-up to the Congress pre-electoral mission (4-6 May 2009), further encounters with candidates running for the post of Mayor of Yerevan are planned. The delegation will receive feedback on latest developments of the electoral campaign from representatives of media (private and state media) as well as from NGOs representatives.

A **press conference** is scheduled for **Monday 1 June at 12.30 pm** (Marriott Hotel, Yerevan).

Press contacts

(In Yerevan): **Renate Zikmund**, Head of the Congress Division of Communication, International Relations and Election Observation, tel. +33 6 59 78 64 55; renate.zikmund@coe.int

Council of Europe Office in Yerevan

tel. +374 10 54 63 22 / 26 / 28 / 29, Fax: +374 10 54 63 19,
coe.yerevan@coe.int



Appendix III: Press Release

Press Release

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Communication Division

Ref: 436a09

Tel. +33 (0)3 90 21 49 36

Fax +33 (0)3 88 41 27 51

Internet: www.coe.int/congress

e-mail: congress.com@coe.int

47 member States

Albania
Andorra
Armenia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Georgia
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Moldova
Monaco
Montenegro
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russia
San Marino
Serbia
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
"The former Yugoslav
Republic of
Macedonia"
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom

Congress delegation concerned about lawfulness of elections in Yerevan, Armenia

Yerevan, 29.05.2009 - After several meetings with government officials, election candidates and the media, the mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to observe the municipal elections in Yerevan (Armenia), scheduled for 31 May, has expressed deep concern over various, repeated reports of irregularities, and in particular intimidation tactics during the election campaign.

The delegation has accordingly requested, on 29 May, a further meeting with Armen Gevorgyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Territorial Development, and Garegin Azaryan, Chair of the Central Electoral Commission, to scrutinise the situation and the lawfulness of the electoral procedures.

More information available at www.coe.int/congress-yerevan

Press contact in Yerevan:

Renate Zikmund, Head of the Congress Division of Communication, International Relations and Election Observation, tel. +33 6 59 78 64 55; renate.zikmund@coe.int



Appendix IV: Press Release

Press Release

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Communication Division

Ref: 436a09

Tel. +33 (0)3 90 21 49 36

Fax +33 (0)3 88 41 27 51

Internet: www.coe.int/congress

e-mail: congress.com@coe.int

47 member States

Albania
Andorra
Armenia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Georgia
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Moldova
Monaco
Montenegro
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russia
San Marino
Serbia
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
"The former Yugoslav
Republic of
Macedonia"
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom

Congress mission welcomes first election of the Yerevan mayor and calls for a better democratic culture in Armenia

Strasbourg, 01.06.2009 – “Our satisfaction in seeing the citizens electing their city council, has been tempered by deficiencies in the conduct of the vote”, said the head of the Congress observation delegation to Yerevan, Nigel Mermagen (UK, ILDG).

The Congress delegation welcomed the fact that by these elections, Armenia proceeded on its way to implement local democracy. The overall organisation of the elections has been broadly carried out in compliance with European standards. In this respect, the election observation mission of the Congress noted a considerable step forward in comparison to the local elections which took place in Yerevan in September 2008.

Nevertheless, the Congress delegation found that the political actors in Armenia should change attitude and behaviour so that the practical conduct of elections, as well as the democratic culture of the country could further improve in the future.

“Democracy is not only about the organisational framework of elections. It is about electoral conduct and culture. Elections have to be clear, fair and transparent even beyond polling stations”, concluded Nigel Mermagen.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe was the only international observer which monitored the municipal elections on 31 May in Yerevan. From 3 to 6 May a three-member pre-election mission was carried out. The actual observation mission was organised from 27 May to 1 June. It included nine Congress members and three members of the European Union Committee of Regions from United Kingdom, San Marino, Poland, Italy, Hungary, France, Estonia and Belgium.

During both the pre-election and the election observation missions, the members of the delegation met with representatives of the government, the political parties and the media as well as with NGOs and Ambassadors.

Contact in Yerevan:

Renate Zikmund, Head of the Congress Division of Communication, International Relations and Election Observation,
tel. +33 6 59 78 64 55; renate.zikmund@coe.int