

Press Release

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Marked improvements in Ukrainian pre-election atmosphere, PACE pre-electoral mission says

Kyiv, 02.03.2006 - The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) pre-electoral mission that visited Ukraine from 28 February to 2 March 2006 today welcomed the vastly improved atmosphere in which the electoral campaign and the preparations for the upcoming Parliamentary elections are taking place. Almost all interlocutors met by the delegation expressed their confidence in the election process until now and their expectation that these elections would be conducted in accordance with universally accepted democratic standards. This is a marked improvement in comparison to the last Presidential elections.

Despite the overall improvements in the election process, some areas of concern, mainly technical in nature, remain. The fact that a significant number of election commissions have not yet been constituted due to a lack of candidates nominated by the political parties, which hampers the timely preparation for these elections, is of great concern. The delegation calls upon all political parties concerned to fulfill their responsibility and to nominate their representatives on the election commissions. In the absence of sufficient nominations by the parties, the delegation would support the proposal by the Central Election Commission (CEC) for an amendment to the election law that would allow the appointment of local civil servants on the election commissions.

The delegation expresses its concern over the possibility of overcrowding in polling stations on election day, particularly given the simultaneous holding of Parliamentary and local elections. In this respect the delegation hopes that the CEC will take all steps necessary to address this, including considering the need for increasing the number of ballot boxes available in each polling station.

The right to vote is a fundamental right of all Ukrainian citizens, including the members of the election commissions. Taking into account the large number of Ukrainian citizens who will serve on these commissions, the delegation supports the proposal of the CEC to allow these members to vote in the polling station where they will be working on election day.

The delegation expresses its hope that the authorities, including the *Verkhovna Rada*, will take all measures necessary to address the remaining issues that could undermine the democratic conducting of these elections. As a last resort, the *Verkhovna Rada* should be ready to adopt the necessary legislation to address issues of a technical nature.

The freedom of the media, and the manner in which they cover these elections, has been greatly improved in comparison to previous elections. This welcome pluralism would have been improved even more if a public broadcaster could have been functioning in time for these elections. In this respect, the delegation regrets that PACE recommendations to this effect have not been implemented by the Ukrainian authorities.

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The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Matteo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).

The delegation is alarmed by the possibility that these elections take place without a functioning Constitutional Court. It therefore calls upon the authorities and the *Verkhovna Rada* to ensure that the members already appointed on the Constitutional Court be sworn in without any further delay.

The conditions are there for the upcoming Parliamentary elections to take place in line with Council Europe standards for democratic elections. All actors should abide by the rules that democratic elections demand. In this respect any abuse of administrative resources by one party or the other would be unacceptable to this delegation. It is now time for all actors to focus on the issues that are of importance to the Ukrainian voters.

The PACE pre-electoral delegation was composed of four members representing different political groups in the Assembly. The members of the delegation were: Renate Wohlwend (Liechtenstein, EPP/CD), Head of Delegation; Hanne Severinsen (Denmark, ALDE); Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (Turkey, EDG) and Doros Christodoulides (Cyprus, UEL). PACE will return to Ukraine with a 50 member delegation to observe the Parliamentary elections on 26 March, alongside delegations from the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and NATO, the European Parliament and the OSCE/ODIHR.

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