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Ref. CG-PR060(2013)

After Yerevan elections: Congress urges Armenian authorities to seize the opportunity of the Council of Europe Chairmanship to increase voters' confidence

Strasbourg, 6 May 2013 - A 12 member-delegation of the Council of Europe Congress composed of representatives from nine European countries including three members of the EU Committee of the Regions has observed the elections for the Yerevan Council of Elders on 5 May 2013. At a press conference in Yerevan, the Head of the delegation and Rapporteur, Stewart Dickson (UK, ILDG), presented preliminary conclusions following the observation of this vote by which also the Mayor of Yerevan was elected.

Congress Rapporteur Dickson stated that, with the exception of individual incidents in a few polling stations, the elections were carried out in a calm and orderly manner and that the vote was technically well prepared, although the counting process, which at times looked chaotic and was slow, needs further improvement. He also stressed that the composition of the Precinct Election Commissions – as stipulated by the Electoral Code, each party and alliance represented in Parliament had one representative and there were two representatives of the Constituency Election Commission – ensured better opportunities for the contesters to scrutinise each other.

He also mentioned cameras present in each polling station and extensive filming which created the impression of overly controlled processes, and the large number of domestic observers whose NGO or media background remained ambiguous to the members of the Congress delegation.

Already prior to Election Day, the delegation became positively aware of a higher level of political competition among parties and alliances but also heard reports by some interlocutors about pressure exerted on public service employees to vote in a certain way and to persuade also other voters and there was the recurring issue of vote-buying. There was also the question of those citizens who no longer live in Yerevan but have stayed on the population register and thus on the voters' lists. "I think that these problems have to be urgently addressed by the Armenian authorities – local issues should be decided by citizens actually residing in a certain community and an electoral climate without intimidations or cash incentives is key for the confidence of the voters," underlined Dickson.

He invited the authorities to seize the opportunity of the up-coming Council of Europe Chairmanship of Armenia to improve voters' confidence in electoral processes. "The Council of Europe Venice Commission said that the new Electoral Code of Armenia has the potential to ensure the conduct of democratic elections but legislation alone cannot ensure this. It is the exercise of political will by all stakeholders – and I mean government and opposition - which makes the difference. There has to be fair play without intimidations and other infringements prior to Election Day and there have to be complaint and appeal procedures for an effective remedy in which citizens can have confidence. Only such an environment can ensure genuinely democratic elections and thus improve the confidence of voters in electoral processes. I am confident that Armenia's Chairmanship will bring a move forward in this respect", Dickson concluded.

[Press release in Armenian](#)
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