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Congress welcomes further consolidation of grassroots democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina but calls for more professionalism in local election administration

Sarajevo, 8 October 2012. – An 18 member-delegation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe concluded today a mission to observe local elections held on 7 October 2012 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The delegation was headed by Congress Rapporteur Amy KOOPMANSCHAP, Mayor of Diemen (Netherlands, L, SOC), and included members from 14 European countries, also representing the EU-Committee of the Regions and the French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions.

In a first preliminary statement the delegation stated that local elections were prepared and conducted in an overall satisfying manner, although some issues of genuinely democratic elections remain to be addressed. Major weaknesses - which were revealed by the delegation at meetings with different interlocutors prior to the Election Day and more specifically during the vote on Sunday – include:

- the influence of parties on the composition of polling station committees in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the role of domestic observers;
- the registration process and the scope of liberality of the electoral law in this respect

as well as

- the issue of assistance for voters who cannot exercise their right to vote alone because of physical deficiencies or illiteracy and family voting.

The use of so-called “tendered” or unconfirmed ballots for those who were not on the voters’ lists but claimed the right to vote in a specific municipality (for example voters with a newly registered residence, first-time voters and absentee voters who happened to be in their municipality on Election Day) caused difficulties, in particular in Srebrenica, with some 100 doubtful ballots. “We urge the relevant authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, notably the Central Election Commission, to look very carefully into this matter. In view of future elections, the use of these tendered ballots needs revision. It has to be clear well in advance of Election Day who is entitled to vote”, said the Congress Rapporteur.

The delegation addressed also the need to professionalise the electoral process. “Bosnia and Herzegovina needs more professionalism, more competent and well-trained and experienced election officials in the polling stations and less party control”, Koopmanschap concluded.

Declan McDONNELL, Ireland (ALDE), member of the EU-Committee of the Regions joined the observations made by the Head of delegation and added: “The Committee of the Regions will take the findings of this mission into account for its opinion on the upcoming annual report of the European Commission on the progress in accession countries.”

Contacts on spot

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Political Groups: Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).