

31st SESSION

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Information report on the assessment of local by-elections in Armenia (18 September 2016)

Monitoring Committee
 Rapporteur: ¹ Liisa ANSALA, Finland (L, ILDG)

Summary

Further to an invitation by the Central Electoral Commission of Armenia, the Congress deployed a limited Electoral Assessment Mission to monitor the local by-elections held on 18 September 2016.

The present information report reflects the key findings of the 15 member-delegation based on in-depth pre-electoral briefings in Yerevan and Armavir and observations made by seven teams in some 100 polling stations in four regions on Election Day.

Apart from some irregularities, the Congress' delegation assessed the elections as technically well-prepared, overall in line with international standards, and carried out in a calm and orderly manner. However, there are recurring issues of concern to Congress' observers, in particular the quality of voters' lists and the fact that these lists include a large number of voters who are residing *de facto* abroad.

Also, the organisation of several partial local elections throughout the year 2016 is remarkable and, in order to ensure transparency and increase public interest in grassroots' elections, the Congress would welcome measures towards establishing one unified Election Day at the local level.

There was a general very low level of political competition with many candidates withdrawing in the course of the campaign.

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

In order to strengthen citizen's trust in the electoral process, the authorities should pay attention to allegations of vote-buying and carousel voting and instances of family voting. Moreover, the accessibility of polling stations for persons with disabilities and elderly people needs to be addressed and this is also true for the grey zone in respect of the so-called "assisted voting" for people who are unable to fill the ballots on their own.

The local by-elections held on 18 September 2016 were governed by the 2011 Electoral Code and did therefore not allow the Congress' observers to assess the implementation of amendments of the new 2016 Electoral Code.

Introduction²

1. At the invitation of the authorities of Armenia received on 8 June 2016, the Congress' Bureau decided on 13 June to deploy an assessment mission in view of the local by-elections in Armenia scheduled for 18 September 2016. The Congress Electoral Assessment Mission was the only delegation of international observers to follow these elections and it was carried out from 14 to 19 September 2016.

2. The 15 member-delegation, headed by the Congress' Rapporteur Liisa ANSALA (Finland, ILDG, L), comprised of eight members of the Congress, two members of the EU Committee of the Regions, according to established practice as well as the Congress' expert and members of the Secretariat. The composition of the delegation, the programme and the places in which delegates were deployed are set out in the appendices.

3. This Electoral Assessment Mission carried out in September 2016, follows on from the observation of local elections by the Congress in the Agavani (Assembly) of the City of Yerevan in 2013 and the observation mission of partial local elections in Armenia in 2012.

4. This Information Report and its conclusions were prepared in consultation with all members of the joint Congress and Committee of the Regions delegation, hereafter referred to as „the delegation“. These findings are based on meetings with the representatives of the diplomatic corps in Yerevan, relevant authorities of Armenia at national level (Central Election Commission, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development) and at local level (local and regional electoral commissions), political parties, candidates, NGOs, the media and the delegation's observations on the ground.

5. The delegation would like to thank all interlocutors for the valuable information they provided and for their willingness to answer the delegation's questions. Furthermore, it would like to thank Natalia VOUTOVA of the Office of the Council of Europe in Yerevan and her team for all the help they provided.

Political context

6. The local by-elections of 18 September were the first elections organised after the hostage crisis at a police station in Yerevan involving a group of armed men which led to the death of three police officers and shook the country in July 2016. Following this incident, the group began a standoff with Government forces, with numerous protesters joining the calls for the resignation of the President.

7. At the same time, these elections were prepared and held during a period of electoral reform in Armenia entailing some uncertainties with regard to the legal framework of elections, in general terms. The new Electoral Code of Armenia and provisions to address, in particular, the prevention of electoral fraud due to multiple voting, has been under discussion between the Government, the opposition, civil society and the Council of Europe Venice Commission over several months. The local by-elections held on 18 September were still governed by the existing 2011 Electoral Code. Therefore, the effectiveness of new measures foreseen to increase the transparency of the electoral process and increase, overall, citizens' trust in elections remains to be assessed by future electoral assessment missions of the Congress.

8. In general, the local by-elections held on 18 September 2016 were characterised by a very low level of political competitiveness between candidates and also, by and large, a lack of public interest in the vote.

² With the contribution of Prof. Christina Binder, University of Vienna.

Excursus: Administrative territorial division and decentralisation reform in Armenia

The territorial structure of Armenia is governed by the Constitution (1995), which lists the basic competences of local authorities. The Law of the Republic of Armenia on Local Self-Government (2002) sets out the role of Local Self-Government in detail. Due to the amendments of the Constitution in 2015, the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Local Self-Government was amended as well. One new aspect is the distinction and delimitation of “mandatory”, “own” and “delegated” powers from the Government towards the Municipalities. However, according to Congress’ interlocutors, these powers are unclearly distinguished as well as their mechanisms for their exercise.

Currently, there are approximately 900 communities, some 800 villages and more than 40 cities. The capital city of Yerevan has a Community status, consisting of 12 districts. Local self-government bodies include a Head of the Community and the Municipal Council with a 4 years’ mandate. The number of members of Councils depends on the population number and varies between 5 and 15.

Furthermore, Armenia is divided into 11 administrative entities of regional level; 10 Provinces (Marzes) and Yerevan. The Provinces are: Aragatsotn, Ararat, Armavir, Geghark'unik', Kotayk', Lorri, Shirak, Syunik', Tavush and Vayots' Dzor. These Provinces are not regional self-governments, since they have no elected representative bodies and are subordinate to the central Government. Each Province has a deliberative body, the Regional (Marz) Council, consisting of the Chiefs of Communities and the regional Governor, but these bodies possess only consultative powers.

In 2013, the Armenian Government approved the concept of community consolidation and formation of inter-communal associations, launching thereby the administrative-territorial reform in Armenia, in particular, through the process of enlargement of Communities. In order to prepare this consolidation process, pilot programmes and local referenda in the respective Communities are foreseen. This process is supposed to reduce the number of municipalities drastically.

On 18 September 2016, the Congress observed local by-elections in two of the already amalgamated Communities (Noyemberyan/Tavush region and Urtsadzor/Ararat region).

Some Congress’ interlocutors uttered mixed feelings with regards to the ongoing territorial reform in Armenia, as some welcomed the amalgamations whereas others were opposed to this process, criticising, in particular, the lack of consultation with the Communities concerned. According to them, there are a number of challenges to be addressed with regards to the reform and the amalgamation process, such as: the distanced authority and limited accessibility; the designation of the Community center; dominant position of the central settlement and lack of attention to smaller settlements; biased approach of the Community Mayors to the enlargement process as well as the necessity to build confidence, trust, and favourable opinion among Community residents. The delegation was also informed about the pending law on financial reform and the importance of adequate funding at local level.

Legal Framework and electoral system

9. The legal framework governing the local elections of September 2016 are the Constitution (including the amendments of December 2015) and the 2011 Electoral Code as well as regulations adopted by the Central Election Commission (CEC). The newly adopted Electoral Code of May 2016 did not apply to these elections.³

10. On 18 September, local by-elections were held in 317 communities in 5 regions (Aragatsotn, Ararat, Armavir, Syunig and Tavush). The majority of Communities (215) conducted both, elections of the Mayor and of Municipal Councillors. 22 Communities only held elections for the post of Mayor and 80 only for Municipal Council seats. In two of the communities observed by the Congress on the

³ See transitional provisions, Electoral Code of May 2016. See below for details on the 2016 Electoral Code. Still, the 2016 Electoral Code could be piloted in the December 2016 local by-elections which would constitute an important test case for the Parliamentary elections in 2017.

18 September (Noyemberyan/Tavush region) and Urtsadzor/Ararat region), it was the first election after a merger of the Communities in the course of the consolidation process.⁴

11. The electoral system applicable to these elections was a single mandate majoritarian system for the elections of the Mayor of the Community. In the election of the Municipal Councillors, one multi-mandate majoritarian constituency was formed in the territory of the Community. The number of Councillors to be elected depended on the population size of the Community (ranging from 5 seats/members in Communities with up to 1.000 voters to 21 seats/members in Communities with more than 70.000 voters). Each voter had one vote in the election of a Community Mayor as well as in the election of Municipal Councillors respectively.⁵

12. The local by-elections of 18 September 2016 were part of a series of partial local elections which were held throughout 2016 (in January, February, March, April and July; with further partial elections to be held in October and December 2016). The Congress welcomes that local elections are being held on separate days, compared to general elections. Nevertheless, while the various election dates were explained by Congress' interlocutors with organisational constraints, the scattered nature of local by-elections is, in the Congress' view, impractical, decreases the attention paid to the respective elections, is confusing for the voter and lowers public attention to elections at the grassroots' level, in general.

Election administration

13. The Electoral Code established a three-tiered system of election commissions, comprising the Central Electoral Commission (CEC, a permanent Body), 41 Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) and Precinct Election Commissions (PECs). The Electoral Code provides for a minimum representation of women (two out of seven members).

14. In the partial local elections on the 18 September 2016, there were 541 PECs composed of at least seven members operational in the five regions. Two members were appointed by the relevant TEC, the remaining members are appointed by political parties who have a faction in the National Assembly (two members each when there are less than five factions in Parliament, one member each when there are five or more).

15. Under the Electoral Code, the PECs (set up for each separate election) are mainly responsible for organising the ballot, counting the votes and summarising the results of voting in the polling station. PECs have to submit to the TECs the seal, the stamp seal of the commission, the register, two carbon copies of the result protocol, the sack for election documents and the ballot box(es). TECs (set up for a period of six years) are in charge, inter alia, of reviewing PEC decisions, supervising the drawing up and posting of voters' lists in the polling stations and, more generally, overseeing the compliance with the Electoral Code in their constituency.

Voter registration and voters' lists

16. According to law, all persons who are registered in Armenia are allowed to vote and are included in the voters' lists.⁶ According to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), voters' lists have been posted and available for download. In case of errors, voters were able to request correction by the CEC. According to the CEC, only two requests for correction have been brought for the 18 September 2016 local by-elections. As a matter of fact, numerous persons who have permanently left the country and who are *de-facto* residing abroad figure on the voters' lists.

17. The accuracy of the voters' lists is thus a matter of permanent concern to the Congress. The high number of voters residing *de facto* abroad who still figure on electoral lists ("phantom" voters) may give raise to electoral fraud. Congress' interlocutors in polling stations generally admitted to knowing the number of persons who had left the country and also thought that these would not come back for the 18 September vote, based on their experiences of previous local elections. Nonetheless, given the possibility that these voters might come back on E-Day and would be entitled to vote in such case,

4 Voters in the following consolidated Communities elected their Mayors and Councilors on 18 September 2016: Urtsadzor (Ararat region), Noyemberyan (Tavush region), Ayrum (Tavush region), Koghb (Tavush region), Goris (Syunik region), Gorayk (Syunik region), Meghri (Syunik region), Togh (Syunik region);

5 See Articles 130, 131 of the 2011 Electoral Code.

6 Article 7 et seq of the 2011 Electoral Code. Voter lists are drawn from the central voter register which is a permanently maintained document. Also other persons, including non-citizens, may have the right to vote in local elections and be included in the voters' list.

according to PECs visited by the Congress' delegation, these voters could not be deleted from the voters' lists.⁷

18. In terms of electoral materials to be prepared for the E-Day, this situation entailed also the question of adequacy of resources since a considerable much higher number of ballot papers were printed than actually needed (and then invalidated).

Candidates' registration

19. According to the Electoral Code, candidates for the Head of Community and Municipal Councilors can be nominated by political parties – based on the decision of their respective district units, as well as by way of self-nomination. A political party may also nominate a person, who is not its member, as a candidate for Head of Community and Municipal Councilors. So far, it is not possible for groups of citizens to nominate a candidate.

20. According to some interlocutors concerns were raised with regards to candidates' registration. There were allegations that a considerable part of candidates running for elections were acquaintances, subordinates, family members, drivers and other persons who withdrew after a certain time because for the election to be held there was the need for at least two candidates.

21. It was also brought to the attention of the members of the Congress' delegation that the number of female candidates has grown for Municipal Councils but only a few female candidates were running for the Head of Community.

Election campaign

22. According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), all parties were able to campaign freely and only one written application had been received in relation to problems concerning campaign posters. Other interlocutors raised concerns about the placement of campaign materials which were not complied with in some places. Still, in general, problems remained limited.

23. Also isolated instances of a misuse of administrative resources during the election campaign were brought to the attention of the Congress delegation, for example in form of the mobilisation of teachers and pupils for campaign purposes by the incumbent. Accordingly, and although tempered through the low level of competitiveness among candidates, the misuse of state resources for campaign purposes remains a matter of concern.

24. According to the CEC, 408 candidates were running for Mayors and 2.693 candidates for Municipal Councilors. These were significantly fewer candidates than those who had initially presented their candidature. While initially 548 candidates had declared their intention to run as Community Mayors, 140 subsequently withdrew; from the 2.825 candidates for Municipal Councils, 132 subsequently withdrew their candidature. Withdrawals were explained by Congress' interlocutors with political pressure and even intimidation as well as the comparative advantage of the incumbents who supposedly were to be re-elected anyway. In result, in 125 out of 237 Communities only one candidate remained on the lists of mayoral candidates in the local by-elections of 18 September 2016.

25. The Congress delegation also noted a general limited organisational and financial capacity of political parties to run especially in small and remote Communities. Most candidates in polling stations visited by the Congress were either self-appointed/independent candidates or candidates from the Republican Party. The Heritage Party had decided to boycott the elections after some of their leaders had been imprisoned in the context of the July 2016 hostage taking events and ensuing demonstrations, although later on they have been released.

⁷ See Electoral lists and voters residing *de facto* abroad at:
[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&Ref=CG/2015\(28\)6FINAL&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInter=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=CACC9A&BackColorLogged=EFEA9C&direct=true](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&Ref=CG/2015(28)6FINAL&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInter=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=CACC9A&BackColorLogged=EFEA9C&direct=true)

New electoral legislation – 2016

26. The legal framework governing the 2016 local by-elections was the 2011 Electoral Code notwithstanding the fact that a new Electoral Code had been adopted in May 2016.

27. The adoption of the new Electoral Code was made necessary by a Constitutional Referendum which had been held in Armenia on 6 December 2015. The proposed amendments to the Constitution were, most importantly, to change from a Semi-presidential system to a Parliamentary Republic, with the changes planned to take place during the 2017-18 electoral cycle. The new electoral system introduced by the new Constitution required the entry into force of a new Electoral Code by 1 June 2016.⁸ The Code was adopted on 25 May 2016, with further amendments agreed upon on 30 June 2016. According to Congress' interlocutors, the electoral legislation is still in the process of revision with further amendments to come.

28. Substantially, the 2016 Electoral Code may provide an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections and addresses some prior Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.⁹ Positive is the introduction of a system to improve voter identification with electronic IDs and finger prints; the enhancement of the Central Electoral Commission's regulatory powers; the strengthening of the quota for the participation of women as candidates; the removal of provisions that could lead to an arbitrary withdrawal of observer accreditation; and a more detailed and systematic regulation of the rules on campaigning.¹⁰

29. Remaining issues of concern are insufficient measures to enhance confidence in the accuracy of voters' lists; a lack of clarity as to how the introduction of new technologies may be implemented, and restrictions on citizen election observers. Further issues of concern are failures to address the limited effectiveness of complaints and appeals procedures; deficiencies in the transparency and accountability of campaign finance; limited safeguards against the potential abuse of administrative resources; and the deficient clarity of regulation and oversight of the media during elections.¹¹

30. Some of these concerns are seemingly addressed in the on-going process of revision and further amendments to the Electoral Code.¹² To exemplify, most recently, in mid-September 2016, an agreement has been reached between opposition and political parties that the voter lists should be published after Election Day to prevent electoral fraud, notably double voting. Also, video equipment should be installed in the polling stations. While these measures may reduce electoral fraud and contribute to increased transparency, they have to be introduced with care since they may also be detrimental to voters' trust in the secrecy of the vote and lead to an overly controlled atmosphere. There is conflict between transparency on one side and the prevention of fraud and the trust of voters in electoral processes on the other side, notably the secrecy of the vote. The Congress' delegation also heard that the number of media outlets accredited to report on elections will be limited in future.

31. According to the Central Electoral Commission, during the December 2016 local by-elections some pilots of the new technology for voter identification might be held as "test cases" for the 2017 national/Parliamentary elections.

Election observation by civil society

32. According to information by the CEC, 10 domestic observer groups, i.e. a total of 353 observers, had been accredited to observe the September 2016 local by-elections.¹³ No observer group had been rejected its accreditation. The Congress was the only international organisation accredited for these elections. The list of citizen ("domestic") observer organisations can be found in the appendix.

8 This introduced hurriedness in the adoption of a new Electoral Code with a first draft – of April 2016 – being sent to ODIHR - the Venice Commission already before the involvement of relevant national stakeholders.

9 See Venice Commission-OSCE/ODIHR Opinion on Electoral Code of April 2016.

10 See Venice Commission-OSCE/ODIHR Opinion on Electoral Code, p 4.

11 Ibid, p 5.

12 See also Second Joint Opinion p. 4-6.

13 List available at: http://res.elections.am/images/doc/dit18.09.16_en.pdf

Media environment

33. There is a general trend towards an increasing use of the internet in Armenia with a growing readership of online media, including a number of politics-oriented portals. According to Congress' interlocutors, also candidates in the local context increasingly use social media (Facebook, etc.) for campaigning and for reaching out to the electorate. Given the generally limited public interest in the campaign for the 2016 local by-elections and the limited financial and campaign resources of many candidates, the increased importance of online media is significant.

34. As regards mainstream media, there are two supervisory bodies in place in Armenia: the National Commission for Television and Radio (NCTR) and the Council of Public TV and Radio. The NCTR oversees all broadcast media, and the Council manages public television and public radio.¹⁴

35. The NCTR is, in principle, tasked to monitor that all candidates are given sufficient airspace. As to the effectiveness and diligence of the monitoring of the 2016 September local by-elections, some Congress' interlocutors raised doubts, however, since these elections were not in the focus of the public interest.

Election Day

36. On 18 September, 541 polling stations in 317 communities opened from 8 am to 8 pm. In those places where Congress' teams observed the opening, commissions were composed according to the law, electoral staff was ready for voters, had duly sealed the ballot boxes and made available the required materials.¹⁵ In general, Congress' observers had the impression that the voting process was well understood by voters and the Precinct Electoral Commissions (PECs) alike who confirmed to have received training, overall.

37. In general, polling stations visited by the Congress' teams were often too small which led to a few instances of overcrowding and disorganisation. Still, the fact that – in implementation of the Electoral Code – the entry of voters to polling stations was limited in accordance with the law, improved the situation and polling was conducted mainly in a calm and orderly manner.

38. Many polling stations did not allow for access of persons with disabilities. As in previous elections, no mobile boxes were in use for these local elections (for bedridden etc.). Nonetheless, there were solutions for those voters who were able to approach the entrance of the Precinct but could not climb the stairs, for example.

39. According to the observations made by the Congress' teams, the secrecy of the vote was largely respected. Only in some cases, instances of videotaping were observed, seemingly violating the secrecy of the vote since cameras were directed towards the polling booth.¹⁶

40. In some polling stations visited by the Congress a relatively high number of cases of so-called "assisted voting" were observed. While assistance by another person is in line with the Electoral Code and was also, overall, duly registered,¹⁷ a disproportionate high number of cases of "assisted voting" in some places may give raise to undue influence of voters.

41. Congress' teams were also informed of a few instances of vote-buying and multiple voting observed by interlocutors. There were some cases of family voting in certain polling stations. As on previous occasions,¹⁸ the Congress' observers noticed that the atmosphere in and around some polling stations was marked by groups of men loitering at the entrances and outside. Still, this

¹⁴ Article 11 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Television and Radio Broadcasting.

¹⁵ Chapter 12 of the 2011 Electoral Code of Armenia stipulates actions to be carried out by PEC members prior to the voting, during the opening procedure, the voting and after the cast of the ballot.

¹⁶ According to the 2011 Electoral Code, videotaping is permissible under the condition that it does not violate the principle of secrecy of the vote.

¹⁷ According to Article 65.4 of the 2011 Electoral Code of Armenia, a voter who is unable to complete the ballot papers may be assisted by another person who shall not be a proxy. The person assisting is limited to providing assistance to only one voter and the Code requires that the name of the person assisting is be entered in the record book of the Precinct Electoral Commission.

¹⁸ Congress Report on local by-elections (9 and 23 September 2012), CPL(24)2rev, 20 March 2013; Congress Report on Election of the members of the Avagani (Assembly of Aldermen) of the City of Yerevan (5 May 2013), CPL(25)3FINAL, 31 October 2013.

atmosphere usually did not amount to intimidation of voters and the polling was carried out in an overall relaxed manner.

42. Counting was generally performed in an orderly manner. However, Congress' observers also noticed that, in some polling stations, the use of envelopes contributed to the tedious counting of ballots at the end of the day.

43. Overall, during their observations, no complaints were filed or brought to the attention of the members of the Congress' delegation.

44. As already mentioned in the present Report, the general atmosphere on Election Day was characterised by an overall absence of political competition. In many electoral precincts candidates had withdrawn prior to E-Day and only one candidate was left and running for the post of Mayor. Also in cases of more than one mayoral candidate it seemed often clear from the outset, who would be elected. Also the general – if at all – insignificantly higher number of candidates for seats in Municipal Councils (e.g. frequent instances of 8 candidates for 7 seats; or even 7 candidates for 7 seats) entailed a general absence of political competition in the places observed by Congress teams. This contributed to the impression, expressed by some Congress' interlocutors that these elections would be mainly of formal character. Exceptions of true political competition were observed e.g. in Echmiadzyn (Armavir region) or in Noyemberyan (Tavush region).

Results

45. According to the results published on the website of the Central Election Commission, the turn-out at the elections of Mayors and Municipal Councillors was 49.42%.

46. There were 647,393 voters eligible to vote. The number of voters registered who received ballots was 319,916.

47. In 237 Communities representatives of the ruling party, Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) (either party members or non-partisan candidates supported by the party), participated in these local elections. RPA members won in 161 Communities, while non-partisan candidates supported by the RPA party won in more than 20 Communities. A detailed summary of election results and the number of votes cast for each candidate is presented on the CEC website as follows: <http://www.elections.am/electionsview/date-20160918/>

Conclusions and recommendations

48. In general, the local by-elections held on 18 September 2016 were carried out in a calm and orderly manner. Technically speaking, the vote was well prepared and, by and large, conducted in line with international standards. With a few exceptions in polling stations visited by the Congress' observation teams, there were no major incidents during E-Day and the electoral staff was able to manage the ballot professionally.

49. There was a general very low level of political competition and, consequently, low public interest in these elections. A more competitive atmosphere was noticed in larger communities, whereas in smaller localities often only one candidate remained on the mayoral list, after others had withdrawn in the course of the election campaign, contributing to the impression that voting at local level is a pure formality instead of a real contribution to the grassroots' decision-making.

50. Congress' observers were told that the December local by-elections may give raise to some "pilots" to put in place the new Electoral Code as test case for the 2017 Parliamentary elections.

51. Among the issues which remain to be addressed are, in particular, the following:

- The question of those citizens who reside, *de facto*, abroad but remain included in the Armenian Voter Register and thus on the voters' lists. In order to both avoid possible electoral fraud ("phantom voters", multiple voting, vote-buying) and to strengthen democracy at the grassroots level, local issues should be decided by those citizens who actually live in the respective community.¹⁹

¹⁹ See Congress of Local and Regional Authorities: Electoral lists and voters residing *de facto* abroad, Resolution 378 (2015) and Recommendation 369 (2015)

- To hold local elections only on one day rather than on several days during the year, to raise public awareness given the importance of decision-making at grassroots' level.
- The accessibility of polling stations for persons with disabilities and elderly people should be improved and the lack of mobile polling boxes in local elections considered.
- The grey zone of "assisted voting" should be reviewed and the disproportionate high number of cases of such voting in some polling stations addressed.
- Further measures to increase female participation would be welcome.
- Finally, allegations of vote-buying, carousel voting and family voting are of concern and the authorities should not lose sight of these issues.

Appendix I

CONGRESS' ELECTORAL ASSESSMENT MISSION
Local by-elections in Armenia to be held on 18 September 2016
Delegation and programme

Delegation

Members of the Congress:

Ms Liisa ANSALA, Finland (L, ILDG), Head of Delegation and Rapporteur

Mr Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC)

Ms Aldis HAFSTEINSDOTTIR, Iceland (R, CRE)

Ms Marianne HOLLINGER, Switzerland (L, ILDG)

Mr Mihkel JUHKAMI, Estonia (L, EPP-CCE)

Mr Dobrica MILOVANOVIC, Serbia (L, EPP-CCE)

Ms Breda PECAN, Slovenia (L, SOC)

Mr Murad QURESHI, United Kingdom (R, SOC)

EU Committee of the Regions:

Mr Joseph CORDINA, Malta (PES)

Mr Jerry LUNDY, Ireland (ALDE)

Expert

Ms Christina BINDER, Congress Expert on observation of local and regional elections

Congress' Secretariat:

Mrs Renate ZIKMUND, Head of Division, Local and Regional Election Observation

Mrs Ségolène TAVEL, Election Observation Officer

Mr Manu KRISHAN, Election Observation Officer

Mrs Martine ROUDOLFF, Assistant, Local and Regional Election Observation

Wednesday, 14 September 2016

Various times **Arrival of the Congress' Delegation in Yerevan**

Thursday, 15 September 2016
Meetings in Yerevan

08:30 – 09:00 Breakfast briefing for the Delegation
 Venue: Hotel Hyatt Palace Yerevan

09:00 – 09:40 Background briefing with the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Yerevan,
Mrs Natalia VOUTOVA, on the overall political situation prior to the elections and
 specific pre-electoral activities (including long-term electoral assistance by the
 Council of Europe)
 Venue: Meeting Hall 2, Hotel Hyatt Palace Yerevan

9:45 – 10:45 Briefing with representatives of the international community:

- Richard Mills Jr, Ambassador of the United States
- Nicolas Faye, First Counselor, Embassy of France
- Barbara Davis, Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission
- Lukas Gasser, Ambassador of Switzerland

- Amias Moores, Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy
 - Andrea Chalupova, Political Officer, Delegation of the European Union
 - Claire Media, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP
- Venue: Meeting Hall 2, Hotel Hyatt Palace Yerevan

- 11:15 – 12:15 Meeting with the President of the Central Election Commission of Armenia, **Mr Tigran MUKUCHYAN**, on preparations of the local by-elections to be held on 18 September and on 2 October 2016
Venue: CEC (21a G. Kochar str.)
- 12:30 – 13:15 Meeting with the Minister of Territorial Administration and Development, **Mr David LOQYAN**, on the 2016 local elections against the background of the consolidation of local democracy in Armenia
Venue: Ministry (Government House 3, Republic Square)
- 13:30 – 14:45 Lunch break
- 15:00 – 16:00 Briefing with NGOs (notably those involved in election observation, anti-corruption, local democracy etc.)
e.g.
 - Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor
 - Union of Informed Citizens
Venue: Meeting Hall 2, Hotel Hyatt Palace Yerevan
- 16:15 – 17:15 Meeting with representatives of Heritage party, **Mr David SANASARYAN, Mr Hovsep KHURSUDYAN**
Venue: Meeting Hall 2, Hotel Hyatt Palace Yerevan
- 17:30 – 19:00 Briefing with media representatives
 - Yerevan Press Club
 - Media Initiatives Center
 - Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression
Venue: Meeting Hall 2, Hotel Hyatt Palace Yerevan

Debriefing and dinner

Friday, 16 September 2016 Meetings in Armavir
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- 09:00 Departure to Armavir
- 10:00 – 10:45 Meeting with the Province Electoral Commission #21 in Armavir
Venues: Province Electoral Commission (Hanrapetutyán str. 30)
Armavir Development Centre (Shahumyan str. 68a)
- 11:00 – 11:45 Meeting with the Executive Director of Armavir Development Centre, **Mrs Naira ARAKELYAN**,
Venue: Armavir Development Centre
- 12:00 – 12:45 Meeting with representatives of local media: Alt TV (Armavir town), Noy Hayastan (Armavir town)
Venue: Armavir Development Centre
- Lunch break
- 14:30 – 16:00 Meeting with candidates running for the 18 September local by-elections (candidates for mayors and councillors from Armavir region)
Venue: Armavir Development Centre

Transfer to Yerevan

Debriefing and dinner

Saturday, 17 September 2016 Meetings in Yerevan
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| 10:00 – 12:00 | Meeting with candidates running for the 18 September local by-elections (candidates for mayors and councillors from Ararat and Aragatsotn regions)
Venue: Urartu Hall, Erebuni Plaza Business Centre |
| 12:30 – 13:30 | Briefing with drivers and interpreters for Election Day
Venue: Urartu Hall, Erebuni Plaza Business Centre |
| 13:30 – 14:00 | Meeting with the Chair of the Union of Communities of Armenia, Mr Emin YERITSYAN
Venue: Urartu Hall, Erebuni Plaza Business Centre |

Sunday, 18 September 2016 ELECTION DAY

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 06:00 | Deployment of 7 teams from Yerevan |
| 23:00 approx. | Late-night debriefing in the Hotel Hyatt Palace Yerevan |

Monday, 19 September 2016

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Various times | Departure of the Congress' Delegation |
|---------------|--|

Appendix II

DEPLOYMENT TEAMS

Team 1 (English interpretation) => province of Tavush

Liisa ANSALA, Head of Congress' delegation
Christina BINDER, Congress' expert
Renate ZIKMUND, Congress' Secretariat

Team 2 (French interpretation) => province of Aragatsotn

Xavier CADORET, Congress' member
Martine ROUDOLFF, Congress' Secretariat

Team 3 (English interpretation) => province of Ararat

Marianne HOLLINGER, Congress' member
Ségolène TAVEL, Congress' Secretariat

Team 4 (English interpretation) => province of Ararat

Breda PECAN, Congress' member
Dobrica MILOVANOVIC, Congress' member

Team 5 (English interpretation) => province of Armavir

Murad QURESHI, Congress' member
Jerry LUNDY, member of the EU Committee of the Regions

Team 6 (English interpretation) => province of Aragatsotn

Aldis HAFSTEINSDOTTIR, Congress' member
Mihkel JUHKAMI, Congress' member

Team 7 (English interpretation) => province of Armavir

Joseph CORDINA, member of the EU Committee of the Regions
Manu KRISHAN, Congress' Secretariat

DEPLOYMENT AREAS

Aragatsotn (elections in 99 localities in total)

2 teams (1 team operating direction Aparan, 1 team operating direction Talin)

Armavir (elections in 93 localities in total)

2 teams (1 team operating east of Armavir, 1 team operating west of Armavir)

Ararat (elections in 84 localities in total)

2 teams (1 team north of Artashat and in Artashat, 1 team south of Artashat including Vedi, Ararat etc.)

Tavush (elections in 36 localities in total)

1 team to cover the province

Appendix III

Domestic NGOs carrying out observation on the 18 September 2016 available at:

http://res.elections.am/images/doc/dit18.09.16_en.pdf



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Ref. CG-022 (2016)

Council of Europe Congress concludes Electoral Assessment Mission in Armenia

Yerevan, 19 September 2016. - In the frame of its targeted mission to assess the local by-elections held yesterday in a part of Armenia's communities, a 15 member delegation from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe visited polling stations in four regions of the country. The delegation, headed by Congress' Rapporteur Liisa Ansala (Finland, ILDG) and including two members of the EU Committee of the Regions, was deployed to Aragatsotn, Armavir, Ararat and Tavush, where, in total, seven teams observed the vote in 100 polling stations.

The polling organised in more than 300 Armenian communities (out of currently some 900) was conducted for both mayoral and councillor seats. In the majority of the municipalities both elections were held, 22 communities voted only for the Mayor, 80 only for the Municipal Council. Overall, the Congress' delegation found that the elections were well organised and E-Day carried out in an orderly manner with the exception of a few incidents and instances of crowdedness in certain polling stations. Overall, more political competition between candidates was noticed in larger communities, whereas in many smaller localities often only one candidate remained in the list of mayoral candidates.

In addition to individual features of the electoral process which need to be addressed by the authorities for future elections, notably the grey zone in respect of the so-called "assisted voting" for elderly and voters with disabilities, the Congress' delegation noticed overall a high number of voters on voters' lists who reside de facto abroad, a situation bearing the risk of electoral fraud and therefore constituting a constant concern for electoral observers.

The new Electoral Code of Armenia and provisions to address, in particular, the prevention of electoral fraud due to multiple voting, has been under discussion between the Government, the opposition, civil society and the Council of Europe Venice Commission over the last months. The local by-elections held on 18 September were still governed by the existing 2011 Electoral Code and did therefore not allow the Congress' observers to assess the effectiveness of measures foreseen to increase the transparency of the electoral process, notably the access of different stakeholders to the list of voters who have actually cast their ballot.

For Congress' Head of Delegation Liisa Ansala the improvement of the quality of voters' lists in Armenia is of crucial importance for the trust of citizens in the system: "Transparency - together with more competition between candidates - is needed to increase the interest of the population in local elections which are currently mainly seen as a formality by the citizens. We will see in how far the new Electoral Code, introducing the proportional electoral system, and the decentralisation reform, which is currently being implemented, will be able to change the situation to the better."

"It is clear that local communities in Armenia need to be strengthened - financially, logistically but also in terms of public awareness for the importance of the local level of government. The organisation of all local elections on one single day in the entire country could be conducive in this respect", Ansala stated.

The detailed Information Report following the Electoral Assessment Mission will be debated in the frame of the 31st Congress Session on 19-21 October in Strasbourg.

Armenia ratified the European Charter of Local Self Government in 2002. The countries which have ratified the Charter are bound by its provisions. The Charter requires compliance with a minimum number of rights, which form the European bedrock of local self-government. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities makes sure that these principles are observed.