

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



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Elections to the People's Assembly in Gagauzia (Republic of Moldova) observed on 16 and 30 March 2008

Paolo Rondelli, San Marino (R, SOC)

Explanatory Memorandum
Bureau of the Congress

Summary :

Following an official invitation from the Moldovan authorities to observe the elections to the People's Assembly of Gagauzia on Sunday 16 March 2008, the Congress appointed an observer delegation headed by Mr Karsten Behr (Germany), Head of Delegation for the observation of the first round, Mr Joseph Borg (Malta), Rapporteur and Mr Paolo Rondelli (San Marino), Head of Delegation for the observation of the second round of the elections (the full composition of the delegation is detailed in Appendix I). Members of the Committee of the Regions were part of the delegation in both rounds of election observation.

The role of the Congress delegation was to examine the electoral process on election day, to ensure it complied with international standards.

The Congress delegation observed the two rounds of the elections, on 16 and 30 March, visiting almost every polling station. The delegation eventually concluded that the elections were held in accordance with Council of Europe and international standards for democratic elections. Some shortcomings were noted and are detailed in this report. Encouragingly, the voter turnout was no less than 64%.

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

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1. Introduction

1. Following an official invitation from the Moldovan Central Electoral Commission to observe the elections to the People's Assembly of Gagauzia on Sunday 16 (and 30) March 2008, the Bureau of the Congress decided to respond positively to the request and appointed an observer delegation.
2. The delegation was composed of Members of the Congress, including also Members of the European Union's Committee of the Regions, accompanied by Congress Secretariat. The Congress observer team formed a unique group as the Members were democratically elected representatives from their respective countries, rendering full legitimacy to the peer exchange and observation of electoral practices.
3. The Council of Europe delegation participated in a number of preparatory meetings organised by the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau. These included a meeting in Chisinau with Mr Andrej Stratan, Deputy-Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Mr Valentin Guznac, Minister of Local Public Administration, Mr Marian Lupu, President of the Moldovan Parliament, Mr Eugen Stirbu, Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova, and non-governmental organisations. The delegation also met with the Turkish Ambassador, Ms Fatma Firat Topçuoglu. In Gagauzia on 15 March, the delegation met leaders and representatives of political parties, Mr P. Ivanov, Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Gagauzia, Mr Stepan Essir, Chairman of the Popular Assembly of Gagauzia and Mr Mihail Formuzal, Bashkan (Governor) of Gagauzia. The final programmes of briefings and meetings organised before the two election rounds are set out in Appendix III.
4. The delegation wishes to thank all those mentioned in the programme for their readiness to meet with the observation team. The delegation extends its gratitude in particular to the authorities of Moldova, including the authorities of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, for their assistance and cooperation. In addition, the delegation also thanks Mr Vlado Ristovski and the staff at the Council of Europe office in Chisinau for their support and assistance, as well as OSCE Head of Office, Ambassador Dieter Boden and his staff.

1.1. The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia

5. Gagauzia (Gagauz-Yeri) is an autonomous territorial unit of the Republic of Moldova, governed on the basis of the Law of the Republic of Moldova on the Special Status of Gagauzia No. 344-XIII of 23 December 1994. Gagauzia employs its own national symbols alongside those of Moldova. It spans three principal districts and a total of 85 km², with a population of approximately 155 000 inhabitants (82% of the inhabitants declare themselves Gagauz). As regards the hierarchy of legislation in Gagauzia, the Moldovan Constitution is followed by the Law on the Special Status of Gagauzia, the Legal Code of Gagauzia and, eventually, Gagauz laws adopted by the People's Assembly of Gagauzia. The People's Assembly (Halk Toplusu) possesses legislative power within the limits of sole jurisdiction so that Moldovan laws are no longer operative in such matters within the autonomous territorial unit.

2. The Electoral administration and process

6. The People's Assembly is made up of 35 legislators, elected for a four-year mandate in the electoral districts through a universal, equal and direct ballot. Any citizen of the Republic of Moldova, eligible to vote, with 21 years of age on election day, residing within the electoral district, may be elected member of the People's Assembly. As from the age of 18, by the day of the election, citizens permanently resident in Gagauzia are entitled to vote.
7. The legal basis for the elections is provided by the Law on Elections to the People's Assembly of 1998 (amended in December 2007). The nine-member Gagauz Central Electoral Commission, an ad hoc body established on the basis of a Decision of the People's Assembly of January 2008, organised the elections with district electoral councils and precinct electoral bureaus under its authority. In accordance with the law, administrative electoral districts of at least 5 000 voters were formed.

8. A second round of elections (runoff vote) is held if none of the candidates acquire more than half of the valid votes in the first round of the elections. The second round must be held within two weeks after the first round, between the two candidates who obtained the most votes. A second round was eventually organised in 17 districts on 30 March 2008.
9. It appears that the applicable Gagauzian laws do not treat all election aspects, which leaves some room for ambiguity vis-à-vis Moldovan national legislation. It should be noted that some points of inconsistency between the Gagauzian legislation and the Electoral Code of Moldova remain. This is a challenge which the Congress already has drawn attention to in the context of the observation of the election of the Governor (Bashkan) of Gagauzia in 2006.
10. The financing of the elections to the People's Assembly turned out to be a complex issue, which could have jeopardised the orderly holding of the elections. According to Article 28 of the local election law, funds for CEC operations shall be provided from the regional budget. However, the People's Assembly had not voted any funding provision in view of the contacts between the Governor of Gagauzia and the central authorities in Chisinau regarding state funding of the elections, and funding was only ensured by the State in the days before the election.

3. The campaign

11. 77 independent candidates and 78 candidates representing formal political groups took part in the elections to the People's Assembly. In essence, there were three major interest groups that competed for the votes: a group close to the Bashkan of Gagauzia, Mr Formuzal, a grouping close to the Mayor of Comrat, Mr Dudoglo and the Communist Party of Moldova.
12. The actual campaign for the elections to the People's Assembly appeared modest to the delegation. According to the international community present in Moldova and the major local NGO that observed the election process, the League for the Defence of Human Rights of Moldova (LADOM), the candidates had access to the local public radio and tv stations. The delegation was told of door-to-door campaigning but there were very few visible signs of campaigning throughout the territory of Gagauzia. The high turnout is therefore likely to confirm that alternatives to traditional campaigning through use of visibility material were deployed in Gagauzia.
13. On the election day (first round) some concerns were raised about electioneering by proponents of the Bashkan, through a repeated broadcast on the radio station HIT FM. However, this incident was stopped through the intervention of the Electoral Commission of Gagauzia.

4. Meetings Prior to the Election

4.1. 14-15 March 2008

14. The Congress delegation, accompanied on 14 March by Mr Vladimir Ristovski, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to Moldova met with a number of high-level officials and political candidates in the two days prior to election day.
15. On the first day of meetings in Chisinau, the delegation met with Mr Valentin Guznac, Minister of Local Public Administration, H.E. Mr Marian Lupu, President of the Moldovan Parliament, Mr Andrei Stratan, Deputy-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration and Mr Eugen Stirbu, Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova.
16. Issues discussed included the recent joint recommendation by the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODHIR that the current 5% threshold for electoral coalitions be reduced. Mr Lupu indicated that this threshold was necessary as Moldova's past experience showed that only parties attaining 5% managed to get into Parliament while many provisionally created blocs were not sustainable and disappeared or dissolved a short time after the constitution of Parliament.

17. In response to the question of Russian humanitarian aid for Gaguzia offered just before the elections and refused by the government, Minister Stratan indicated that such aid would be gladly accepted after the elections but to do so now would politicise the aid and interfere with the impartiality of the elections.
18. With regard to election day, Mr Stirbu pointed out the high number of international observers keen to participate – seventy-seven different international organisations and embassies had requested accreditation (the largest being the Turkish embassy).
19. The delegation highlighted the importance of submitting all future draft changes to the Electoral Code, and any new relevant draft legislation, to the Council of Europe for opinion.
20. A fruitful exchange of views with a number of members of NGOs including the Eurasia-Moldova Fund and the League for Human Rights Protection of Moldova (LADOM) as well as the Deputy Director of the Association of Independent Press (API), followed by a briefing by the OSCE Mission to Moldova, enabled members of the delegation to get a clearer picture of irregularities that might be expected on election day, such as family voting and the so-called “voting carousel” where a pre-filled ballot paper is substituted for a blank one as well as the use of mobile phones to record bought votes. Issues discussed included alleged misuse of administrative resources by certain candidates and low perceived electorate engagement; some put low voter interest down to “election fatigue” others to the uncertainty regarding funding and to the fact that the media were hardly covering the elections.
21. The lack of funding for these elections has meant that among other things polling station commissioners have had to work under harder conditions: they are paid less than before (40% less) and the teams are formed for the election period only – meaning that there is little or no institutional memory. Fewer staff have been seconded for longer term periods (only one per station) meaning more work has to be done within a shorter time frame.
22. Local NGOs also described their programmes for voter education (Association for Participatory Democracy - ADEPT) and mentioned plans for election day – every single polling station would be covered by a team of observers and several roundtables for training polling station officers had been organised and attended by some 200 people (LADOM). The observers indicated that there had been no real campaigning to speak of, only some door-to-door canvassing and a series of blame-throwing articles in the press.
23. The second day of meetings took place in Comrat, capital of Gaguzia, where the Congress delegation met with Mr Stepan Essir, Chairman of the Popular Assembly of Gaguzia, Mr Mihail Formuzal, Bashkan of Gaguzia and Mr P. Ivanov, Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Gaguzia. The delegation was especially keen to hear whether the serious funding problems regarding the election had been solved and if so, how, and what effect if any this would have on election day. They were reassured that the issue had been resolved and the ballot papers printed.
24. The Congress team was told by Mr Ivanov of the extensive training in seminars and workshops given to members of electoral commissions with the help of LADOM (who even paid for transport costs). Two members of every commission were trained and asked to transfer their knowledge to their colleagues. LADOM had also distributed pre-paid mobile phone cards and given them to local electoral committees to ensure that accurate information regarding election results was received as quickly as possible and a parallel election count was established. All courts and prosecutors’ offices would be open on 16 March, the delegation was further informed, to enable candidates or citizens wishing to do so to appeal or go directly to the court with any complaints. The phone numbers for all complaints had also been announced by Mr Ivanov on the local television.
25. During the different meetings with independent candidates and candidates of several major parties participating in the elections; Democratic Party, Our Moldova Alliance Party, Social Democratic Party, Communist Party, Movement “Ravnopravie” independent candidates representing the Edinaia Gaguzia Movement and the party of Mr Nicolai Dudoglo, Mayor of Comrat, the delegation heard several allegations of fraud, misconduct, misuse of administrative resources, unequal or total lack of access to the media (in particular television time), slander and intimidation. However, no concrete

proof was forthcoming. The poverty of the region was cited as one of the main reasons behind the alleged selling of votes.

4.2. 28-29 March 2008

26. Upon arrival, the delegation met with Mr Karsten Neukirch and Mr Jean-Pierre Golubic of the OSCE Mission, who provided updated information on the political situation in Gagauzia and on the three principal deployment zones. The following day a meeting was organised with Mr Eugen Stirbu, the Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova, who confirmed that the first round had been conducted in an orderly manner, as well as a detailed briefing with the Council of Europe's Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr Vlado Ristovski, on the overall political situation in Moldova.

5. Election Day

5.1. 16 March 2008

27. On election day the Congress delegation's five teams left Chisinau to arrive in time to observe the opening procedures at a chosen polling station within their designated areas. Five polling station openings were observed and all procedures were seen to be undertaken in a professional and transparent manner.

28. The Congress teams also observed closing and counting procedures in a further five polling stations and concluded that, as with the opening procedures, no serious irregularities were found.

29. By the end of the day the five teams had between them visited 56 polling stations out of a total of 61.

30. All teams noted that a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere prevailed in the polling stations, with many voters bringing their children and plenty of chairs being set out for both domestic and international observers. Indeed, the presence in every polling station by domestic observers was seen by the delegation as a positive development.

31. The Congress delegation was pleased to find that the conduct of proceedings was largely in accordance with international electoral standards and that where certain irregularities, such as instances of family voting, were observed these were not such as to undermine the viability of the electoral process and were generally not done for fraudulent purposes. The delegation concluded that significant improvements had therefore been made overall with regard to voting procedures and in respect of recommendations made by Congress observers in the past.

32. Following the observation of a number of shortcomings the teams did make a series of suggestions outlined below and which were presented by the Head of Delegation during a press conference on 17 March.

5.2. Voters

33. Since it was apparent that many voters were not sufficiently aware of the procedures to be followed, a number of changes, aimed at improving voter knowledge, were suggested by the delegation such as, for example, making far greater use of the information material already issued by the Central Electoral Commission - in particular the "how to vote step-by-step" posters available in the three main languages of Gagauzia (Gagauz, Moldovan and Russian). Polling stations should be instructed to use such material systematically and given information on how to display it.

5.3. Polling station staff

34. The delegation commended the professional attitude of the staff of the polling stations who were working in difficult conditions, given the funding problems which meant less pay and fewer seconded longer-term (and therefore more prepared) staff.

35. However, while many members of polling station commissions claimed to have been given specific training, sometimes as a whole team, further training appears necessary. In this respect, members of the polling station commissions should be reassured that their job does include giving information on correct voting procedures (such as proper folding of ballot papers, individual voting, etc) and if done in the correct manner does not constitute unwarranted interference.
36. Furthermore, the ideal division of labour should be known and understood by all staff, and in no circumstances should the chair of a polling station commission, who should be available for administrative questions and problem solving, become involved in essential procedural tasks themselves (such as stamping ballot papers).

5.4. Polling stations and their material

37. The material used by polling stations could be modified to improve secrecy of the vote: booths should have only one entrance – where there was an entrance and an exit, even if clearly marked, there was a certain amount of accidental cross-over of voters. In addition the booths should have three-quarter length curtains so that occupancy is evident. The transparency of the ballot boxes gave rise to some concern – especially as voters were not folding their ballots properly and some papers were clearly visible. The delegation felt that a simple, cost-effective remedy was to partially cover the bottom part of the box, thus hiding the ballots once inside, but leaving the top transparent to permit verification that single ballots only were being put into the box. This appears to have been implemented during the second round of voting. Lastly, but very importantly, the teams were concerned by the extreme fineness of the paper used for the ballot papers: these were so translucent that the voter's choice (made in heavy ink with a stamp) could be seen – again a particular problem if papers were folded incorrectly.
38. Funding issues right up to election day meant that basic material was scarce, for example the ink pads for the rubber stamps almost ran dry in several polling stations with staff making do by adding water to try to make them last. This led to several stamp impressions being almost invisible and as a result a few votes had to be invalidated during the counting.
39. The layout of the polling stations themselves was seen as an important factor in the efficient, transparent and orderly management of proceedings. For example, in some cases booths were placed in such a manner as to partially obstruct observers' view of the whole room, or voters were crowded round tables at the height of the voting. Concrete guidelines could be provided by the Central Electoral Commission to ensure maximum visibility of proceedings and ensure a fluid flow of voter traffic not to mention considering access for the elderly and disabled.
40. Lastly, the teams were concerned by the heavy use of supplementary voters lists at a number of polling stations and welcomed and underlined the urgent need for the electronic, regularly updated register of voters mentioned notably by Mr Eugen Stirbu, Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova as being in the pipeline.

5.5. Runoff - 30 March 2008

41. The Gagaguzian law on elections to the People's Assembly stipulates that a candidate may only win the seat if he/she gained more than half of the valid ballots. Should this not be the case a second round is required between the two candidates who gained the most ballots; the runoff is won on a simple majority basis (in case of an equal number of ballots, the candidate with the most votes in the first round is declared winner). In the case of the March elections, the run-off concerned a total of 17 seats in the People's Assembly.
42. The delegation was grouped into three teams, which were deployed in the three principal districts: Comrat, Ceadir-Lunga and Vulcanesti. The teams left from Chisinau in the early morning and were in place for the opening procedures in three respective polling stations. All three opening procedures were reported as quite good. During the day a further total of 27 polling stations were visited by the Congress teams. It was only in the Southernmost Vulcanesti region that two polling stations could not be visited due to road conditions.

43. The teams stayed in close contact during the day and were also in contact with the OSCE mission to Moldova, as well as the other, mostly local, observers present in the polling stations. It quickly became clear that the conduct was orderly and that there was noticeable progress in, for example, ballot handling compared to the first round of the elections. The ballot was marked with an additional stamp and the ballot boxes were consistently covered by paper up to a height of two thirds of the box, to ensure a better secrecy of the vote. These measures were consistently implemented throughout the polling stations.
44. The mobile voting arrangements left some room for improvement. Regarding one polling station more than 80 requests for mobile voting were registered but in the end the mobile ballot box team was only able to reach some 40 voters; the other voters that had requested a mobile vote did not have a possibility to exercise their right to vote. On another occasion, a person who had requested a mobile vote also turned up at the polling station.

6. Results

6.1. First round of the elections – 16 March 2008

45. The first round of the elections to the People's Assembly of Gaguzia took place on 16 March 2008. The Congress delegation that observed the first round of the elections was headed by Mr Karsten Behr (Germany), with Mr Joseph Borg (Malta) as Rapporteur. The other Members of the delegation were Mr Mehboob Khan (United Kingdom), Ms Dominique Ronga (France), Ms Britt-Marie Lövgren (Sweden) and Ms Helena Pihlajasaari (Finland) and Committee of the Regions members: Mr Uno Silberg (Estonia), Ms Sharon Taylor (United Kingdom) and Ms Heini Utunen Ziv (Finland).
46. In the first round of the elections, 18 members of the People's Assembly were elected:
- 12 independent candidates;
 - 3 representatives of the Communist Party of Moldova (PCRM);
 - 1 representative of the "Ravnopravie Movement";
 - 2 representative of the Democratic Party.

6.2. Second round of the elections – 30 March 2008

47. The second run-off concerned a total of 17 seats, throughout all three districts, at a total of 32 polling stations.
48. The observation of the second round was ensured by a Congress delegation headed by Mr Paolo Rondelli (San Marino). The other members of the delegation were Ms Véronique Moreira (France), Mr Mehboob Khan (United Kingdom) and the two representatives of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, Ms Heini Utunen Ziv (Finland) and Ms Sharon Taylor (United Kingdom). The delegation observed the elections in all three districts and visited almost all polling stations (30 of 32 polling districts visited).
49. In the second round, seventeen members of the People's Assembly were elected with the following affiliation:
- 9 independent candidates;
 - 7 representatives of the Communist Party of Moldova;
 - 1 representative of the "Ravnopravie Movement"

6.3. Overall election results

50. The final results were as follows, as also confirmed by the Moldovan authorities:
- 21 independent mandates;
 - 10 mandates for the Communist Party of Moldova;
 - 2 mandates for the Democratic Party;
 - 2 mandates for the "Ravnopravie Movement".

51. No political grouping received a majority in the People's Assembly, which opened the way for coalition discussions with a number of possible permutations.
52. The turnout was a comparatively high and encouraging 64%. It was also a positive sign that the turnout was as high in the second round as in the first one.

7. Conclusions

53. The overall assessment of the Congress delegation is that elections were organised in accordance with international electoral standards. The delegation welcomed the courteous atmosphere in polling stations, noted during both rounds of the elections, and the inclusive attitude towards observers, who were present in all visited polling stations.
54. In the second round the delegation found noticeable progress compared to the first round on 16 March 2008. Additional measures had been taken to ensure ballot handling and secrecy (an additional stamp on the ballot paper and ballot boxes covered two-thirds by paper).
55. In both rounds the delegation was informed of minor irregularities at several polling stations, but it was deemed that these irregularities would have little impact on the overall solidity of the electoral process.
56. The delegation also noted that the electoral responsibilities of polling station commissions largely were undertaken by women.
57. For the future, a key challenge is to compile and regularly update a central register of voters, not least to minimise the need for supplementary registration on site. Such election day registration still occurred on a significant scale in the second round of the elections, in spite of the fact that the supplementary lists from the first round of the elections were incorporated into the voter rolls used in the second round of the elections.
58. Furthermore, the Congress strongly encourages the Gagauz authorities to ensure that appropriate budgetary provision is made in good time to allow for effective preparation of elections in the future.
59. Last but not least, the delegation also strongly recommends the authorities to make additional efforts to locate premises for polling stations on the ground floor, to facilitate access for voters with disabilities.

APPENDIX I

COMPOSITION OF CONGRESS DELEGATION: FIRST ROUND ON 16 MARCH 2008

Congress / Congrès

- **Mr Karsten Behr**, Member of Parliament, Niedersächsischer Landtag (Germany/Allemagne, EPP/CD, R) – **Head of delegation**
- **Mr Joseph Borg**, Councillor of Mellieha (Malta/Malte, EPP/CD, R) - **Rapporteur**
- **Mr Mehboob Khan**, Member, Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council (United Kingdom/Royaume-Uni, SOC, R)
- **Ms Britt-Marie Lövgren**, Vice-Mayor, Umea (Sweden/Suède, ILDG, L)
- **Ms Helena Pihlajasaari**, Chair of the Board, Regional Council of Centra Finland, Vice-Chair of the Municipal Council of Laukaa (Finland/Finlande, SOC, R)
- **Ms Dominique Ronga**, delegated to the interregional relations and the decentralised co-operation, Vice-President of the Regional Council of Lorraine (France, SOC, R)

Committee of the Regions / Comité des Régions

- **Mr Uno Silberg**, Member of the External Relations Commission, Vice-President of the CoR (ET/UEN-EA)
- **Ms Sharon Taylor**, Member of the External Relations Commission, CoR (UK/PES)
- **Ms Heini Utunen Ziv**, Member of the External Relations Commission, CoR (FI/ALDE)

Congress Secretariat / Secrétariat du Congrès

- **Ms Dolores Ríos Turón**, Secretary of the Committee on Social Cohesion
Co-ordination of election observation
- **Ms Gönül Kocak**, Assistant

COMPOSITION OF CONGRESS DELEGATION: SECOND ROUND ON 30 MARCH 2008

Congress / Congrès

- **Mr Paolo Rondelli**, Municipal Councillor of San Marino (San Marino/Saint-Marin, SOC, R), **Head of delegation**
- **Mr Mehboob Khan**, Member, Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council (United Kingdom/Royaume-Uni, SOC, R)
- **Mrs Véronique Moreira**, Regional Councillor of Rhône Alpes (France, SOC, R)

Committee of the Regions / Comité des Régions

- **Ms Sharon Taylor**, Member of the External Relations Commissions, CoR (UK/PES)
- **Ms Heini Utunen Ziv**, Member of the External Relations Commission, CoR (FI/ALDE)

Congress Secretariat / Secrétariat du Congrès

- **Mr Fredrik Holm**, Head of the Co-ordination and Management Division of the Congress,
Co-ordination of election observation
- **Ms Gönül Kocak**, Assistant

APPENDIX II
PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE CONGRESS DELEGATION
ON 17 MARCH 2008

Elections for Peoples' Assembly of Gagauzia: in accordance with international standards but room for improvement

Chisinau, 17.03.2008 - A delegation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, including representatives of the Committee of the Regions, observed the first round of elections for the Peoples' Assembly of Gagauzia in the Republic of Moldova on 16 March 2008.

The delegation covered the whole area of the Autonomous Territorial Unit and visited almost all polling stations.

In the run-up to the elections the delegation heard allegations of fraud, misconduct, misuse of administrative resources, unequal or total lack of access to the media (in particular television time), slander and intimidation. However, with regard to election day, the delegation concluded that while some issues still need to be addressed, significant improvements have been made with regard to voting procedures, which were largely in accordance with international electoral standards.

Head of Delegation Karsten Behr welcomed the courteous and friendly atmosphere that prevailed in polling stations and the inclusive attitude towards observers – both domestic and international. A further positive development for the transparency of proceedings was the presence of NGOs in all polling stations visited.

Funding problems rendered working conditions for members of the different election commissions particularly difficult and the Congress delegation applauds their professionalism. However, in order to help them fulfil their mandate while further improving efficiency and secrecy, the delegation makes the following recommendations:

- appropriate budget provision should be made in good time to allow for effective preparation of elections;
- all polling stations should make use of the information material issued by the Central Electoral Commission;
- members of the polling station commission should inform voters more consistently on correct voting procedures including proper folding of ballot papers to ensure secrecy;
- booths should preferably have only one entrance to avoid two people being in the same booth accidentally and have three-quarter length curtains so that occupancy of the booth is evident;
- the Central Electoral Commission could provide lay-out guidelines for polling stations to ensure maximum visibility of proceedings and avoid overcrowding;
- paper used for ballot papers should not be translucent;
- the chair of the polling station commission should observe procedures without becoming involved in the procedural tasks themselves;
- an electronic, regularly updated register of voters should urgently be set up to eliminate supplementary voters lists which have been heavily used in this election.

The Congress delegation applauds the high level of participation of women in polling station commissions, including as Chair, however this should not deter men from greater involvement.

The Congress delegation encourages the Gagauzian and Moldovan authorities to take advantage of the recommendations they put forward in the forthcoming Congress report and use them to further improve voting procedures and pre-election campaign conditions, particularly with a view to parliamentary elections scheduled for 2009.

The authorities are further invited to send any future amendments to the Electoral Code of Moldova and the Law on Elections of the Peoples' Assembly of Gagauzia to the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe for opinion well in advance of any forthcoming elections.

PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY CONGRESS DELEGATION ON 31 MARCH 2008

Elections for the People's Assembly of Gagauzia: second round confirms that the authorities organised elections in accordance with international standards

Chisinau, 31.03.2008 - A delegation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, including representatives of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, observed the second round of elections for the People's Assembly of Gagauzia in the Republic of Moldova on 30 March 2008.

The delegation covered the whole area of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, visiting all districts and almost every polling station.

The election was organised by the Gagauzian authorities, on the basis of a local electoral law, with support from the central authorities of Moldova. The Head of Delegation, Mr Paolo Rondelli (San Marino), welcomed the orderly conduct which marked the second round of the elections. The Congress delegation underlined the good cooperation between the central authorities and the authorities of Gagauzia and the implementation of the principle of decision-making as close as possible to the citizens, which also is fundamental from the point of view of the EU's Committee of the Regions.

The delegation found that there was noticeable progress compared to the first round of the elections on 16 March 2008. Additional measures had been taken by the authorities concerning ballot handling and secrecy. The delegation was informed of minor irregularities at several polling stations, which had little impact on the overall robustness of the electoral process. The detailed Congress recommendations following the observation of the first round of the elections remain valid, for example that the paper used for the ballots should be less translucent. Furthermore, mobile voting has to be managed consistently.

For the future, one of the key challenges is to compile and regularly update a central register of eligible voters, to minimise the need for supplementary registration on site. Such registration still occurred on a significant scale, in spite of the fact that the supplementary lists from the first round of the elections were incorporated into the voter rolls used in the second round of the elections.

The Congress will issue a report on the elections and encourages the Gagauzian and central authorities to take full advantage of its recommendations, particularly with a view to the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2009.

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APPENDIX III

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND BRIEFINGS ATTENDED BY THE CONGRESS DELEGATION ON 14-15 MARCH 2008

Thursday, 13 March 2008

Arrival of the delegation and staff members – welcome at the airport

Transfer to: **Hotel Jolly Alon**
Str. Maria Cibotari 37,
Chisinau, Republica Moldova, MD-2004
Telefon : (373-22) 23 22 33
Fax : (373-22) 23 28 70

19:00 -21:00 Dinner with **H.E. Mrs Fatma FIRAT TOPCUOGLU**, Ambassador of Turkey to Moldova and:
➤ Ms Dolores Rios
➤ Ms Heini Utunen Ziv
➤ Mr Karsten Behr
➤ Mr Joseph Borg
➤ Mr Vladimir Ristovski
➤ Ms Gonul Kocak
Venue: Ambassador Residence

Friday, 14 March 2008

7:45 - 8:15 Delegation briefing
Venue: Hotel Jolly Alon, meeting room

8:30 - 9.30 Meeting with **Mr. Valentin GUZNAC, Minister of Local** Public Administration
Venue: Ministry of Local Public Administration

10.00 - 10.50 Meeting with **H.E. Mr Marian LUPU**, President of the Moldovan Parliament with the presence of:
➤ Mr. Vladimir Turcanu, Chairman of the Legal Commission for Appointments and Immunities of the Moldovan Parliament
➤ Mr. Vladimir Ciobanu, Commission for Public Administration
Venue: Parliament of the Republic of Molodva

11:00 – 11:50 Meeting with **Mr. Eugen STIRBU**, Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova
Venue: Central Electoral Commission

12:00 - 13:30 Joint meeting with national NGOs (Coalition 2008):
• **Mr. Sorin MEREACRE**, Eurasia-Moldova Fund
• **Mr Igor BOTAN**, Director of Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT)
• **Mr. Paul STRUTZESCU**, League for Human Rights Protection (LADOM)
• **Mr. Dumitru LAZUR**, Deputy Director of Association of Independent Press (API)
Venue: CoE Office (meeting room)

Lunch

- 15:00 - 15:50 Meeting with the **H.E. Mr Andrei STRATAN**, Deputy- Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration
Venue: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration
- 16:00 – 16:50 Meeting with **Mr. Vladimir RISTOVSKI**, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to Moldova
Venue: CoE Office (meeting room)
- 17:00 – 18:00 Meeting with **OSCE / ODIHR**
Venue: OSCE Mission to Moldova

Saturday, 15 March 2008

- 05:30 *Breakfast*
- 06:15 Deployment to Gagauzia
- 08.00 – 08.30 Meeting with candidates of the **Democratic Party**
Venue: Conference Room of the Comrat University (Comrat,17 Galatan str.)
- 09:00 – 09:50 Meeting with **Mr P. IVANOV**, Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Gagauzia
Venue: Executive Committee of Gagauzia (Comrat, 196 Lenin str.)
- 10:00 -10:50 Meeting with **Mr. Stepan ESSIR**, Chairman of the Popular Assembly of Gagauzia
Venue: Executive Committee of Gagauzia (Comrat, 196 Lenin str.)
- 11:00 - 11:50 Meeting with **Mr. Mihail FORMUZAL**, Bashkan of Gagauzia
Venue: Executive Committee of Gagauzia (Comrat, 196 Lenin str.)
- Lunch*
- 13.30 – 14.00 Meeting with the **independent candidates**
Venue: Conference Room of the Comrat University (Comrat, 17 Galatan str.)
- 14:00 – 14.30 Meeting with the candidates of **Our Moldova Alliance Party**
Venue: Conference Room of the Comrat University (Comrat, 17 Galatan str.)
- 14.30 – 15.00 Meeting with the candidates of the **Social Democratic Party**
Venue: Conference Room of the Comrat University (Comrat, 17 Galatan str.)
- 15:00 – 15:30 Meeting with the candidates of the **Communist Party**
Venue: Conference Room of the Comrat University (Comrat, 17 Galatan str.)
- 15:30 – 16:00 Meeting with the candidates representatives of the **Movement “Ravnopravie”** and some independent candidates representing the **Edinaia Gagauzia Movement**
Venue: Conference Room of the Comrat University (Comrat, 17 Galatan str.)
- 16:30 – 17:00 Meeting with **Mr. Nicolai DUDOGLO**, independent candidate, Mayor of Comrat
Venue: Comrat, 315 Lenin str.

Return to Chisinau

Sunday 16 March 2008

ELECTION DAY

05:00 *Breakfast*

05:30 Deployment to Gagauzia

Monday 17 March 2008

8:00 - 09:00 De-briefing and preparation of press release
Venue: Hotel Jolly Alon, meeting room

10:00 – 11:00 **Press Conference**
Venue: Infotag News Agency

**PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND BRIEFINGS ATTENDED
BY THE CONGRESS DELEGATION
ON 28-29 MARCH 2008**

Friday, 28 March 2008

Arrival of the delegation and staff members – welcome at the airport

Transfer to: **Leograd Hotel & Convention Center**
77 Mitropolit Varlaam str.
MD-2012, Chisinau
Republic of Moldova
Tel.: (373-22) 201 201
Fax: (373-22) 201 222
E-mail: info@leogradhotels.com
Web-site : http://www.leograd.md/en/contact_info.html

19:30 – 20:30 Meeting with **OSCE / ODIHR**
Venue: OSCE Mission to Moldova

Saturday, 29 March 2008

10:00 – 11:00 Delegation briefing
Venue: Leograd Hotel, meeting room

13:30 – 14:30 Meeting with **Mr. Vladimir RISTOVSKI**, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to Moldova
Venue: CoE Office (meeting room)

15:00 – 16:00 Meeting with **Mr. Eugen STIRBU**, Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova
Venue: Central Electoral Commission

Sunday, 30 March 2008

ELECTION DAY

04:00 *Breakfast for the team 3 / Vulcanesti*
04:30 Deployment to Gagauzia *for the team 3 / Vulcanesti*

04:30 *Breakfast for the team 2 / Cadir Lunga*
05:00 Deployment to Gagauzia *for the team 2 / Cadir Lunga*

05:00 *Breakfast for the team 1 / Comrat*
05:30 Deployment to Gagauzia *for the team 1 / Comrat*

Monday 31 March 2008

10:00 - 11:00 De-briefing and preparation of press release
Venue: Leograd Hotel, meeting room

APPENDIX IV

DEPLOYMENT AREAS on 1st Round – 16 March 2008

Team	Deployment Areas	Team Composition
1	Comrat	Ms Heini Utunen Ziv Ms Dolores Ríos Turón Mr Karsten Behr
2	Cadir Lunga	Ms Sharon Taylor Mr Joseph Borg
3	Vulcanesti	Mr Mehboob Khan Ms Britt-Marie Lövgren
4	Rural areas (North)	Ms Helena Pihlajasaari Mr Uno Silberg
5	Rural areas (South)	Ms Dominique Ronga Ms Gönül Koçak

DEPLOYMENT AREAS on 2nd Round – 30 March 2008

Team	Deployment Areas	Team Composition
1	Comrat	Ms Heini Utunen Ziv Mr Paolo Rondelli Mr Fredrik Holm
2	Cadir Lunga	Ms Sharon Taylor Ms Véronique Moreira
3	Vulcanesti	Mr Mehboob Khan Ms Gönül Koçak