

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 338 (2013)¹ Local by-elections in Armenia (9 and 23 September 2012)

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:

a. Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2011)2 relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the revised Charter appended thereto, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 19 January 2011, and, in particular, its Article 2, paragraph 4, on the Congress' role in the observation of local and regional elections;

b. the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), ratified by the Republic of Armenia on 25 January 2002;

c. its Recommendation 255 (2008) on local elections in Armenia, observed on 28 September 2008 and its Recommendation 277 (2009) on the first municipal elections in Yerevan, Armenia (31 May 2009);

d. the Joint Opinion of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) on the Electoral Code of Armenia, adopted on 26 May 2011.²

2. The Congress underlines the importance of genuinely democratic elections and its specific mandate and role in the observation of local and regional elections in Council of Europe member States.

3. It stresses that the Congress observes elections only upon invitation by the countries concerned. Like the monitoring process of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, election observation missions are conceived in a spirit of co-operation and dialogue between the Congress and the country concerned.

4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that a new Electoral Code, containing significant improvements, was adopted on 26 May 2011. The new code introduces the possibility for political parties to appoint candidates to stand for election as mayor or municipal councillor (Article 133) and an increase in the number of municipal councillors in the bigger municipalities.³

5. The Congress acknowledges the progress made since the previous local elections and that the polls were conducted in

a calm and orderly manner, with a satisfactory rate of participation.⁴

6. The Congress nevertheless notes that:

a. the presence of too many people in most of the polling stations visited by the delegation, some of whom were not authorised to remain there, may have disrupted the voting and vote-counting process; the tense atmosphere outside these polling stations was also noted;

b. as a rule the chairs of the local electoral commissions were familiar with the Electoral Code and electoral practices but, in some cases, more thorough training is necessary.

7. The Congress regrets the lack of commitment to local governance shown by most of the political parties and the poor media coverage consequently given to these elections.

8. Moreover, with regard to women's participation, while they were well represented in the polling station committees, the Congress nevertheless regrets that very few women stood for election or were elected as mayors or municipal councillors.

9. Although enough space had generally been set aside for voting in most polling stations visited, the Congress regrets that, despite the provisions of the Electoral Code, almost all of the polling stations visited by the delegation were inaccessible to people with disabilities.

10. Taking account of the above-mentioned elements, the Congress invites the Armenian authorities to take appropriate measures to:

a. increase women's participation in local politics⁵ and, in particular, their access to the posts of mayor and municipal councillor, for example by encouraging political parties to seize the opportunity provided by the new Electoral Code to appoint candidates, thereby increasing the number of women, and by offering information and training to women;

b. place emphasis on training and the qualities required by the chairs of local electoral commissions in each polling station;

c. limit the number of people present in polling stations;

d. make practical improvements in the organisation of elections, in particular in vote counting so as to speed up the process;

e. make all polling stations accessible, as well as the built environment and transport, and pursue their efforts to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote and stand for election, in consultation with the organisations representing them, in keeping with Council of Europe instruments in this field;⁶

f. create genuine political pluralism through the emergence of an opposition force in order to offer voters a choice of candidates.

11. The Congress also urges the Armenian authorities to take appropriate steps to prevent fraud, namely:

a. by reminding returning officers of the absolute necessity of checking the identity of each voter against their own personal passport;

b. by ensuring that “assistance” is offered to the elderly only if requested and in accordance with their real needs;

c. by systematically punishing practices involving the distribution of money observed in certain polling stations.

12. Finally, the Congress encourages the Armenian authorities to explore, together with the Congress and other partners, the possibilities for improving governance, local self-government and the electoral process, by drawing on the

principles set out in the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 20 March 2013, and adopted by the Congress on 21 March 2013, 3rd Sitting (see Document CPL(24)2, explanatory memorandum, presented by Henry Feral, France (L, EPP/CCE), rapporteur).

2. Opinion No. 611/2011, Document CDL-AD(2011)032 of 17 October 2011.

3. Up to 21 councillors in municipalities with over 70000 voters (Article 131).

4. This was 49.5% on 9 September and 53.3% on 23 September 2012.

5. See Resolution 303 (2010) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life”,

6. Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states of the Council of Europe on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life,