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Observation of the Parliamentary elections in Serbia (11 May 2008)

Report¹

Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau of the Assembly

Rapporteur: Mr Jean-Charles GARDETTO, Monaco, Group of the European people's Party

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I. Introduction

1. The Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly decided, at its meeting on 13 March 2008 and subject to receipt of an invitation, to set up an Ad hoc Committee to observe the Parliamentary elections in Serbia, scheduled for 11 May 2008 and authorised a pre-election mission to that country. Following the receipt of an invitation from the Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia, the Bureau, at its meeting on 14 April 2008, appointed me as the Chairman of the Ad hoc Committee.

2. On 4 October 2004, a co-operation agreement was signed between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law ("Venice Commission"). In conformity with Article 15 of the agreement: "*When the Bureau of the Assembly decides to observe an election in a country in which electoral legislation was previously examined by the Venice Commission, one of the rapporteurs of the Venice Commission on this issue may be invited to join the Assembly's election observation mission as legal adviser*", the Bureau of the Assembly invited an expert from the Venice Commission to join the Ad hoc Committee as adviser.

3. Based on the proposals by the political groups of the Assembly, the Ad hoc Committee was composed as follows:

M. Jean-Charles GARDETTO, Head of Delegation

Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)

M. Pedro AGRAMUNT, Spain
Mr Ignacio COSIDÓ GUTIÉRREZ, Spain
M. Jean-Charles GARDETTO, Monaco

¹ Approved by the Bureau at its meeting on 29 May 2008.

Ms Anna LILLIEHÖÖK, Sweden
Mr Kimmo SASI, Finland
Mr Egidijus VAREIKIS, Lithuania
Mr Piotr WACH, Poland

Socialist Group (SOC)

Mrs Meritxell BATET, Spain
Mrs Maria Emilina FERNANDEZ SORIANO, Spain
Mr Andreas GROSS, Switzerland
Mrs Sinikka HURSKAINEN, Finland
Mr Geert LAMBERT, Belgium
Mr Maximiano MARTINS, Portugal
Mr Vasile Ioan Dănut UNGUREANU, Romania

European Democrat Group (EDG)

Mr Igor CHERNYSHENKO, Russian Federation
Mr Morten MESSERSCHMIDT, Denmark
Mr Robert WALTER, United Kingdom
Mr David WILSHIRE, United Kingdom
Mr Vladimir ZHIDKIKH, Russian Federation

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

Ms Doris FIALA, Switzerland
Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN, Denmark
Mr Morten ØSTERGAARD, Denmark
Mr Andrea RIGONI, Italy
Mr Andrej ZERNOVSKI, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"

Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)

Mr Tuur ELZINGA, Netherland

Secretariat

Mr Vladimir DRONOV, Head of Secretariat, Interparliamentary co-operation and election observation unit
Mr Yann DE BUYER, Head of the Administrative and Finance Unit
Ms Farida JAMAL, Administrative Assistant, Interparliamentary co-operation and election observation unit
Mr Serguei KOUZNETSOV, Venice Commission
Ms Nathalie BARGELLINI, Press Officer
Ms Christine WILLKOMM, Assistant

4. The pre-election delegation visited Belgrade on 9 and 10 April 2008. Notwithstanding the Bureau decision that this was to be a cross-party delegation composed of members of the five political groups of the Assembly, only EPP/CD and ALDE were represented in the delegation. The delegation had an extensive and intensive programme of meetings and held discussions, *inter alia*, with the Head of the Republic Election Commission, a cross-section of media and civil society representatives, as well as of political parties not represented in the parliament. The Delegation also met the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM) and the delegation of the European Commission in Belgrade. Unfortunately, a meeting planned with members of the Serbian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly did not take place. The programme of meetings of the pre-election delegation is reproduced in Appendix 1.

5. The pre-election delegation, generally, was satisfied with the state of preparations for the parliamentary elections. It particularly welcomed the widespread public confidence in the electoral process. As a result, the delegation concluded it had grounds to believe that the elections would be organised and conducted properly.

6. At the same time, the delegation identified some deficiencies that needed serious attention from the authorities. These included lack of effective provisions and enforcement mechanisms covering party and campaign funding, inadequate powers of the Republic Election Commission, which resulted in its lack of control over the entire electoral process, including the compilation and maintenance of voters' lists, as well as media monitoring during the campaign period. The delegation was also concerned over the excessive control the party leaderships have over candidates' lists which enables party leaders to change the order of the candidates in the list or even remove candidates from the list after the election, so that the persons that voters thought they would be electing may end up not being given a mandate to be members of parliament by their parties.

7. The delegation was conscious of the fact that the aforementioned shortcomings could not be remedied before the 11 May 2008 vote and regarded them as challenges for the future.

8. The delegation encouraged greater involvement of persons belonging to national minorities in the political process, with a view to ensuring better representation of them in the National Assembly.

9. The press statement issued by the delegation at the end of its mission in Belgrade is reproduced in Appendix 2.

10. The Ad hoc Committee, for its part, worked as part of an International Election Observation Mission (LEOM) alongside the election observation mission of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the IEOM of OSCE/ODIHR. A delegation from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, for its part, observed the local and provincial election conducted on the same day.

11. Following the debates at the April 2008 part session in which the question was raised regarding inter-institutional relationships in election observation and visibility in election observation, the Ad hoc Committee sought and achieved recognition of its central role in the IEOM, as reflected in the IEOM press release and the LEOM Statement of Preliminary Findings.

12. The Ad hoc Committee met in Belgrade from 8 to 12 May 2008 and held, *inter alia*, meetings with a representative cross-section of political parties, the Chair of the Republic Election Commission (REC), the Head of the LEOM of the OSCE/ODIHR and his staff, the Head of the EC Delegation in Belgrade, members of the diplomatic corps, as well as representatives of the civil society and the mass media. The programme of the meetings of the Ad hoc Committee appears in Appendix 3.

13. On election day, the Ad hoc Committee was split into fourteen teams which observed the elections in and around Belgrade, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar and Presovo Valley. Altogether, more than 200 polling stations were covered by members of the Ad hoc Committee on election day.

14. The Ad hoc Committee concluded that the Parliamentary Elections in Serbia, on 11 May 2008, overall were in line with Council of Europe commitments for democratic elections. The citizens of Serbia could freely make their choice on election day from a pluralist range of political platforms. The press release issued after these elections appears in Appendix 4.

II. Political and legal framework, candidates' lists registration

15. On 13 March 2008, the President of the Republic of Serbia dissolved the Parliament and called early parliamentary elections on 11 May 2008. The move followed a political crisis that ensued in the wake of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and disagreement in the ruling coalition over the issue of co-operation with the European Union.

16. Parliamentary elections in Serbia are governed by the 2006 Constitution and the Law on Election of Representatives (LER), as last amended in 2004. In addition, individual aspects of the process are regulated by decisions of the REC, as well as other pieces of legislation.

17. On the whole, the legal framework provides a credible basis for the conduct of democratic elections. However, certain aspects of the process need improvement, as underscored, *inter alia*, in the Statement of the Assembly pre-election Delegation (Appendix 2), as well as in the joint Venice Commission-OSCE/ODIHR assessment of the electoral legislation in Serbia.

18. The National Assembly of Serbia comprises 250 members elected for a four-year term in a single, nation-wide constituency. Seats are distributed proportionally among lists which have received

more than five per cent of all votes cast. The five percent rule does not apply to minority parties. Political party leaderships however have excessive control over their respective lists in that they can, after elections, change the order of the names on the lists or even remove certain candidates from the lists altogether.

19. Registration of candidates' lists was generally inclusive, with 22 lists of parties, coalitions and groups of citizens registered by the REC. Those lists included 10 lists of people belonging to national minorities. Two lists were rejected by the REC.

20. Although minority parties criticised the new requirement that parties must collect 10000, rather than 3000 signatures of support (as was the case in the 2007 elections), they were able to meet this new legal requirement. Nevertheless having to obtain a greater number of signatures might complicate and make more difficult the involvement of the minorities in the country's political life and in particular in the parliament, with a risk of isolation for such minorities and a possible negative effect on the whole region. Minority parties participated in these elections both on their own, and in coalitions with mainstream parties.

21. Signatures in support of a candidates' list had to be put in person, or through a proxy, and upon presentation of an ID document and proof of payment of RSD 50, in front of a court clerk. This requirement arguably could compromise the concept of the secrecy of the vote. At the same time, it offered guarantees of signature authenticity. The REC's responsibility was to establish that the number of signatures in support of a list was in fact, at least 10,000, and that the voter concerned signed in support of one list only.

III. Election administration

22. Serbia has a multi-tiered election administration, which comprises the Republic Election Commission (REC), one Provincial Electoral Commission (PEC) in Vojvodina, two City Electoral Commissions (CECs) in Belgrade and Niš, 161 Municipal Electoral Commissions (MECs) and some 8,246 Polling Boards (PBs). In addition, some 30 members or deputy members of the REC operate as Regional Co-ordinators (RCs)

23. The REC set up five MECs and a number of working groups to take care of elections in Kosovo. According to the OSCE ODIHR, on 9 April 2008, UNMIK indicated that it did not object to parliamentary elections being held in Kosovo.

24. The REC is composed of its President and 16 members and their deputies appointed by the National Assembly. The National Assembly also appoints a non-voting Secretary and a non-voting member representing the Republic Statistical Office. The expanded composition also includes one representative of each submitter of a registered candidates' list.

25. The overwhelming majority of the interlocutors met by the Ad hoc Committee expressed general support for, and confidence in, the work of the REC.

26. According to the law, a uniform, electronic national voters' register is to be established. This task has not yet been accomplished. In practice, there exist municipal computerised voters' registers compiled in different electronic formats.

27. The ministry for State Administration and Local Self-Governance supervises the maintenance of the registers which are updated on an annual basis. Municipal Authorities, together with the Ministry of the Interior, are jointly responsible for keeping the voters' register up to date. Voters were called on to check their data in the voters' registers between 14 March and 25 April 2008. Voters abroad could apply for registration to embassies and consulates up to 20 April 2008.

IV. The media environment

28. Serbia's media landscape is diverse. Media are freely operating in a loosely regulated environment. Television is the most important medium in terms of public outreach and the most important source of information. Print media circulation remains low.

29. The legal framework for the media coverage of the election campaign is established by the LER and the Broadcasting Act (BA). The BA set up a regulatory authority, the Republic Broadcasting Agency (RBA) with broad powers in a variety of media-related areas.

30. On 4 April 2008, the RBA Council issued General Binding Instructions to Radio and TV Stations on the conduct to be observed in local, provincial and parliamentary elections in 2008. Under those instructions, all election-related programmes, reports, advertisements and polls must be marked as an "election programme". Paid airtime must bear the logo 'paid time'. Public broadcasters are to provide all electoral contestants with an equal amount of free airtime.

31. Articles 90 and 100 of the LER provide for the establishment of a supervisory board appointed by the National Assembly for general supervision of the actions of political parties, candidates and mass media during the campaign. Those provisions have not been implemented.

32. Overall, the media, as monitored by the LEOM, provided a balanced and diverse coverage of the campaign. The tone of campaign coverage was, overall, neutral, with the exception of one tabloid (the Kurir), which was criticised by associations of journalists for aggressive and unprofessional reporting.

V. Complaints and appeals

33. Complaints regarding irregularities of the electoral process or infringements of voters' rights can be lodged with the REC. Appeals against the rulings of the REC are adjudicated by the Supreme Court.

34. Altogether, 48 complaints were lodged, including a complaint by the SRS contesting the REC instruction whereby minority parties were obliged to collect only 3,000 signatures, and not 10,000. The Supreme Court upheld that complaint on the grounds that the REC decision was in contradiction with the law requiring all parties to collect 10,000 signatures, and the instruction was revoked. As a result, minority parties had to collect 10,000 signatures which they managed to do despite complaining about this requirement. Other complaints covered a broad range of issues including, *inter alia*, membership of polling boards, rules for accreditation of foreign observers, alleged distribution of gifts and other material incentives to voters by election contestants, failure by the National Assembly to establish a Supervisory Board, and the REC's failure to provide timely and objective information about candidates to the voters. All of these complaints, however, were dismissed as unfounded or rejected on the grounds of late submission.

35. The Supreme Court delivered 11 decisions on 11 appeals against REC decisions and upheld only one (see para 34, above).

VI. The campaign

36. During the campaign period the political environment was generally peaceful. The dominant issues were Kosovo, Serbia's position *vis-à-vis* the EU, as well as the work of the outgoing Government. The latter triggered pointed disputes between former coalition partners, the Democratic Party (DS) of Boris Tadić and his partners from G17 Plus, on the one side, and Prime Minister Koštunica's coalition of his Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and New Serbia (NS), on the other. The strongest opposition party, the Radical Party of Serbia (SRS), opted for a low profile.

37. As for the minority parties, the Hungarian parties came forward with a joint platform aimed at improving the status of Hungarians in Serbia. The two Bosnian parties continued infighting leading to some clashes between their activists.

38. Campaigning was mostly calm, despite some negative campaigning by some contestants. In an unfortunate development, certain isolated aspects of the campaign went beyond acceptable limits for a democratic society. Death threats to some senior officials were reported. This culminated with the

display, in Belgrade, of a large number of posters that could be interpreted as suggesting the assassination of top State officials. The Public Prosecutor ordered an investigation into the matter.

VII. Election day

39. On election day, IEOM observer teams observed the process at some 600 polling stations, with over 200 polling stations covered by members of the Ad hoc Committee.

40. Voting and counting were conducted professionally and in a calm atmosphere. Cooperation between polling board members and their knowledge of the voting procedures were reported to be good.

41. Observers of the Ad hoc Committee reported numerous cases of family voting, which were observed at almost all polling stations visited.

42. Procedures were generally followed; voters were checked for ink in more than 99 percent of cases, identification documents were checked in nearly 100 percent of cases.

43. There were a few problems. Ballot boxes were not adequately sealed in some polling stations visited. The design of voting booths – especially the fragile card board separations – was regarded by observers of the Ad hoc Committee as inadequate in terms of ensuring the secrecy of the ballot. However, there were no reports of any attempts to take advantage of this deficiency.

44. The presence of unauthorised persons at polling stations was not reported at these elections.

45. Observers reported cases of ballot papers being placed in the wrong ballot boxes, due to similarities of colours of ballot papers used for parliamentary and provincial and local elections. Misplaced ballots were, however, counted as valid for the respective elections.

46. While the polling boards' broadly inclusive membership contributed to the transparency of and confidence in the process, it led to instances of overcrowding, especially for the opening of ballot boxes and the vote count.

47. Generally the polling stations were not accessible to disabled persons. Nevertheless these had the option to choose home voting.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

48. The Ad hoc Committee concluded that the 11 May 2008 Parliamentary elections in Serbia, overall were in line with the Council of Europe and OSCE commitments for democratic elections, although they were overshadowed, in part, by some negative aspects of the campaign.

49. The elections were administered professionally and in an atmosphere of public confidence in the process.

50. The elections provided a genuine opportunity for the citizens of Serbia to choose from a range of political parties and coalitions, which vigorously competed in an open and overall calm campaign environment.

51. To further improve Serbia's democratic processes, the Ad hoc Committee invites the Serbian authorities to:

- a) expand the authority of the REC so as to enable it to have monitoring powers over all aspects of the campaign;
- b) change the current system, whereby political party leaderships have excessive powers over their candidates' lists, so as to ensure that the electorate knows for which persons it is voting for;
- c) introduce additional legislation and procedures to cover all aspects of political parties and campaign funding;

- d) complete and enforce regulations and procedures for the monitoring of the medias during the campaign;
- e) improve the quality of the seals on ballot boxes; take and enforce adequate measures to avoid family voting;
- f) improve the design of voting booths to enforce confidentiality of voting;
- g) use ballots papers of clearly different colours in case several elections are conducted at the same time;
- h) make the polling stations accessible for disabled persons.

APPENDIX 1

**Ad hoc Committee to observe the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia
(11 May 2008)**

Pre-election mission

9-10 April 2008

Programme

Wednesday, 9 April 2008

Hotel Majestic

- 09.00 Opening of the meeting by the Head of the pre-electoral mission
- 09.30 Briefing by the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade
- 10.15 Briefing by the European Commission Delegation in Belgrade .Ms Esmeralda Fernandez Arragonnez, Head of the Political, Information and Civil Society Section
- 11.15 Meeting with the President of the Supreme Court, Ms. Vida Petrović Škero
- 12.30 Briefing by Mr Nikolai Vulchanov, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission
- 14.30 Meeting with a cross-section of political parties not represented in the Parliament:
- SPO (Serbian Renewal Movement), Mr Srdjan Srećković
- DPA (Democratic Party of Albanians)- Mr Ragmi Mustafa
- 15.30 Mrs Sonja Brkic, Head of the Electoral Commission and
Ms Tamara Stojčević, Deputy Secretary of the Electoral Commission
- 17.00 Meeting with the representatives of the Media
1. NUNS (Independent Associations of the Journalists of Serbia)

Thursday, 10 April 2008

- 10.00 Meeting with the National Delegation of Serbia to PACE (Parliament Building)
- 11.30 Meeting with representatives of the Civil Society:
1. CESID (Centre for Free Elections and Democracy)
2. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (Belgrade; Novi Sad), Ms Sonja Biserko,
Director
- 16.00 Press conference (Media Centre)

Friday, 11 April 2008

Departure

APPENDIX 2

Accreditation of international observers for the Serbian parliamentary elections ‘should not be conditional on extraneous issues’

Belgrade, 10.04.2008 – The accreditation of international observers for the 11 May 2008 Parliamentary elections in Serbia should not be conditional on extraneous issues, concluded the pre-electoral delegation² of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Serbia should honour its commitments to international organisations of which it is a member; and should not link the accreditation of observers to the issue of Kosovo.

Serbia is a full member of the Council of Europe, an organisation distinct from the European Union, and is a community upholding the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law for 800 million people. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) recognises Serbia's advances along the path of democracy-building. In this connection, based on exchanges it had in Belgrade, the delegation believes that the upcoming elections will be well organised and conducted properly.

They will be of pivotal importance in that they will determine the vector of Serbia's development for the future. The citizens of Serbia deserve the right to unimpeded travel; the younger generation of Serbia should have the right to receive education abroad. PACE stands ready to throw its support behind the Serbian people in their efforts to turn their country into a true 21st century democracy.

While satisfied with the state of Serbia's preparation for the upcoming elections, some issues still need further improvement: there is a need for effective provisions and enforcement mechanisms covering party and campaign funding; the powers of the Republic Election Commission should be expanded to allow it to better monitor the entire process, including the control over the quality of the voters list; media monitoring during campaign periods should be put in place, although the delegation is not aware of any grave problems in the latter area. The delegation understands that such improvements cannot be introduced in time for the May 11 vote and regards these issues as challenges for the future. In addition, the delegation encourages greater involvement of people belonging to national minorities in the political process to ensure their better representation in the Parliament.

The delegation was in Serbia on 9 and 10 April 2008 at the invitation of the Speaker of the Parliament of Serbia, to assess the political framework and state of preparation for the 11 May 2008 parliamentary elections. It had an extensive and intensive programme of meetings and held discussions, *inter alia*, with the Head of the Republic Election Commission, representatives of the Association of Independent Journalists and civil society, and a cross-section of political parties not represented in the Parliament, as well as the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission and the Delegation of the European Commission in Belgrade. A thirty-member PACE election observation delegation will arrive in Serbia 8 May 2008 and will be deployed to ensure the maximum possible coverage of the country.

Contact:

Serbia: Vladimir Dronov, Head of the Secretariat of the Interparliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation Service, mobile +33 (0)6 63 49 37 92.

Strasbourg: PACE Communication Unit, tel. +33 (0)3 88 41 31 93.

². Jean-Charles Gardetto, Head of Delegation (Monaco, EPP/CD), Andrej Zernovski (“the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, ALDE)

APPENDIX 3

**Ad hoc Committee to observe the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia
(11 May 2008)**

Programme

Hyatt Regency Belgrade

Thursday, 8 May 2008

Arrival of the members.

Friday, 9 May 2008

08.30 PACE Ad hoc committee meeting

09.00 Opening by the Heads of Delegations

- Mr Jean Charles Gardetto, Head of the Parliamentary Assembly Delegation
- Mr Roberto Battelli, Head of the OSCE PA Delegation

Briefing with ODIHR

- Mr Nikolai Vulchanov, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission

10.00 Joint briefing of Parliamentary Assembly/OSCE PA and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

- Ambassador of Sweden, Mr Nils Krister Bringéus,
- Ambassador Constantin Yerocostopoulos, Special Representative of the Secretary General in Serbia
- Ambassador Josep Lloveras, Head of the European Commission Delegation to Serbia
- Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, Head of OSCE Mission to Serbia
- Chargé d'affaires of Slovenia
- Chargé d'affaires of Slovakia

13.00-18.00 Joint meeting with a cross-section of political parties (30 min each)

13.00-13.30 Meeting with Union of Roma of Serbia - Mr Rajko Djuric, MP

13.30-14.00 Meeting with a representative of the Bosniak List for a European Sandzak, Mr Bajram Omeragic, MP

14.00-14.30 Meeting with a representative of the Coalition gathered around Democratic Party, Mr Milos Jevtic, MP

14.30-15.00 Meeting with a representative of the Coalition gathered around DSS/Nova Srbija (Democratic Party of Serbia), Mr Milos Aligrudic, MP

15.00-15.30 Meeting with the representative of SRS (Serbian Radical Party) TBC

15.30-16.00 Meeting with representatives of the Coalition of Albanians of the Presevo Valley, Mr Nuhiu Mentor and Mr Hasani Fatmir

16.00-17.00 Meeting with representatives of LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) Mr Zoran Ostojčić and Mr Vrebalov

17.00-17.30 Meeting with a representative of SPS (Socialist Party of Serbia), Mr Nikola Nikodijević

17.30 Joint Meeting with the Chair of the Republican Election Commission, Mrs Sonja Brkić

Saturday, 10 May 2008

09.00 Parliamentary Assembly Ad hoc Committee meeting - Deployment

10.00- 10.30 Joint meeting with representatives of CESID (Centre for Free Elections and Democracy), Dr Zoran Lucic

10.30-11.30 Joint Meeting with representatives of the civil society:

- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (Belgrade; Novi Sad), Ms Sonja Biserko, Director
- Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, Ms Sonia Licht, President and Mr Slobodan Markovic, Advisor
- Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights, Ms Bilijana Kovacevic-Vuco

12.00 Joint meeting with the representatives of the Media

- NUNS (Independent Associations of the Journalists of Serbia)
- Danas Daily
- Centre for Profesionalisation of the Media (Stevan Niksic)
- Fox TV
- B92 (TV and radio station)

13.00 Meeting with interpreters and drivers

Sunday, 11 May 2008

Observation of the Parliamentary elections

Monday, 12 May 2008

08.00 Ad hoc Committee Meeting: debriefing, assessment of the election (Budva Room)

09.00 Heads of delegation meeting

13.00 Press Conference (Media Centre)

APPENDIX 4

Serbia's hard-fought and generally well-organized parliamentary elections gave voters a free choice

BELGRADE, 12.05.2008 – The vigorously contested early parliamentary elections in Serbia were conducted in an overall professional manner, allowing the country's voters to choose freely among a wide range of political options, the International Election Observation Mission concluded in a statement published today.

The observers welcomed the active participation of voters, testifying to the electorate's high confidence in the democratic process. Voting on election day was conducted efficiently and in an overall calm atmosphere. The campaign environment was pluralistic and open, with extensive media coverage, but also marred by incidents of threats against leading politicians' lives.

"The Serbian people have expressed their will freely. It is now up to the newly elected parliament to live up to the expectations of the Serbian electorate. This includes the need to forge a workable and effective coalition capable of working for the benefit of all citizens of Serbia", said Jean-Charles Gardetto, leader of the PACE observer delegation.

"The Serbian elections were a display of a mature democracy in action. We found some minor technical faults and some aspects of the campaign were worrisome, but the elections were carried out in a most impressive fashion with substantive voter turnout and efficiency and calmness of the voting. I would like to congratulate Serbia for this", said Roberto Battelli, Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE short-term observers and head of the OSCE PA delegation.

"Overall this election was organized professionally. But we are troubled by cases of death threats and perceived incitement to murder of senior politicians. This has no place in a democratic society. Prompt follow-up to the Public Prosecutor's investigation order will further underscore that there is no tolerance for violence in Serbia", said Nikolai Vulchanov, head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term observation mission.

The observers urged the new parliament to close remaining voids in the legal framework and address long-standing recommendations, such as removing provisions permitting parties to allocate mandates in disregard of the order of the candidates' lists.

Close to 90 international observers monitored the election, including 30 short-term observers from the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and 24 from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), as well as 35 long-term observers from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). The international election observation mission did not observe the local elections.

For further information contact:

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