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### **Elections for the Peoples' Assembly of Gagauzia: in accordance with international electoral standards though there is room for improvement**

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.

#### **Members of the Congress delegation**

**Karsten Behr**, Member of Parliament, Niedersächsischer Landtag (Germany, EPP/CD) – **Head of Delegation**

**Joseph Borg**, Councillor of Mellieha (Malta, EPP/CD)

**Mehboob Khan**, Member, Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council (United Kingdom, SOC)

**Britt-Marie Lövgren**, Vice-Mayor, Umea (Sweden, ILDG)

**Helena Pihlajasaari**, Chair of the Board, Regional Council of Centra Finland, Vice-Chair of the Municipal Council of Laukaa (Finland, SOC)

**Dominique Ronga**, Vice-President of the Regional Council of Lorraine, Responsible for interregional relations and decentralised co-operation, (France, SOC).

**Members of the EU Committee of the Regions, External Relations Commission (RELEX)**

**Uno Silberg**, Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions of the EU, Chairman of Kose Municipal Council, (Estonia/UEN-EA)

**Sharon Taylor**, Member, East of England Regional Assembly (United Kingdom, PES)

**Heini Utunen Ziv**, Member, Jyväskylä City Council, (Finland/ALDE)

**Congress Secretariat**

**Dolores Rios Turon**, Secretary of the Committee on Social Cohesion

**Gönül Koçak**, Congress Secretariat