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Observation of the parliamentary elections and the early presidential election in Serbia (6 May 2012)

Election observation report

Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau

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

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1. Introduction

1. At its meeting on 23 January 2012, the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly decided, in principle and subject to receipt of an invitation from the competent national authorities and confirmation of the date, to observe the elections in Serbia and form an ad hoc committee for the purpose, consisting of 30 members, and authorised a pre-election mission that would take place about a month prior to the elections. The Bureau, at its meeting on 8 March 2012, took note of the declarations that the candidates for the observation mission had no conflicts of interest, approved the membership of the ad hoc committee, and appointed Mr Jean-Charles Gardetto Chairperson. On 23 April 2012, the Bureau approved the final composition of the ad hoc committee (see Appendix 1).

2. Under the terms of Article 15 of the co-operation agreement signed between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) on 4 October 2004, “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”. In accordance with this provision, the Bureau of the Assembly invited an expert from the Venice Commission to join the ad hoc committee as an advisor.

3. A pre-election delegation went to Belgrade on 17 and 18 April 2012 in the context of a pre-election mission to assess the preparation of the elections and the election campaign, ahead of the parliamentary elections and the early presidential election on 6 May 2012. The delegation met Ms Slavica Đukic Dejanovic, Speaker of the Parliament, Mr Ivica Dacic, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Mr Duško Radakovic, Secretary of State, Ministry for Human Rights and Minorities, State Administration and Local Self-Government, the Chairperson of the Republic Election Commission (REC), the President of the Republic Broadcasting Agency and representatives of the main parliamentary groups. However, the representatives of

the chief opposition parliamentary group “For Serbia” were not available to meet the members of the delegation. Meetings were also organised with representatives of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the limited mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE (OSCE/ODIHR), as well as with representatives of civil society and the media.

4. On the whole, during the pre-election mission the delegation noted with satisfaction that all the political players stated that they had confidence in the electoral process, including the election campaign which, for most political parties, focused essentially on the issues of unemployment, socio-economic development, European integration and, to a far lesser extent, on Kosovo.¹

5. The delegation stressed that a number of provisions introduced into the electoral legislation, amended in 2011, would improve the effective choice of the citizens: the introduction of closed lists and the end of “party-controlled mandates”, the abolition of “blank letters of resignation” and better access of women to Parliament by means of a gender quota. While observing that this framework provided the conditions for genuinely competitive elections, it urged all political parties to implement these changes in good faith and in the spirit of the law. The introduction of a single list of voters at the national level is also a positive measure. The delegation also took note of the complaints lodged by the small political parties concerning fair access to financing and to the media.

6. The ad hoc committee operated in the framework of an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) alongside the limited observation mission of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the limited election observation mission (LEOM) of the OSCE/ODIHR. A delegation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe moreover observed the local and provincial elections held the same day.

7. The ad hoc committee met in Belgrade on 4 and 5 May 2012. In particular, it met Ms Slavica Đukic Dejanovic, Speaker of the Parliament, representatives of the political parties contesting the election, and presidential election candidates, a member of the Republic Election Commission, the head of the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM and his assistants, and representatives of civil society and the media. The programme of the ad hoc committee’s meetings is set out in Appendix 2. The ad hoc committee wishes to thank the staff of the Council of Europe office in Belgrade, together with the limited election observation mission (OSCE/ODIHR) for their co-operation and assistance.

8. On the day of the ballot, the ad hoc committee split into 11 teams which observed the elections in Belgrade and its outskirts, as well as in the following regions and municipalities: Novi Sad, Bačka Palanka, Vrbas, Sombor, Zemun, Pancevo, Smederevo, Mladenovac, Obrenovac, Smederevo Palanka, Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Kruševac Čačak, Niš, Paracin, Aleksinac, Prokuplje, Leskovac, Piroć, Vranje, Bujanovac, Preševo, Novi Pazar, Tutin and Raška. In all, the members of the ad hoc committee visited more than 182 polling stations on the day of the ballot.

9. The ad hoc committee concluded that the parliamentary elections and the early presidential election held in Serbia on 6 May 2012 “addressed most of the Council of Europe standards for democratic elections. The citizens made their choice freely among a large number of parties and presidential candidates. Nevertheless, the media coverage could have been more balanced. Regarding the transparency of campaign financing, the PACE delegation looks forward to the report of the Anti-Corruption Agency on this issue”. The ad hoc committee also commended the efforts made by the international community and by Belgrade and Pristina, which enabled the Serbian citizens of Kosovo to exercise their right to vote. The press release published after the elections is reproduced in Appendix 3.

2. Political and legal framework

10. On 13 March 2012, the President of the Republic of Serbia, Mr Boris Tadić, decided to hold the parliamentary elections on 6 May 2012. The local and provincial elections were set for the same date. On 5 April 2012, more than 10 months before the end of his term, the President of Serbia resigned and the President of the Parliament of Serbia decided to hold the early presidential election also on 6 May. Since the organisation of multi-party elections began in Serbia in 1990, it was the first time that different elections had taken place on the same date.

1. All reference to Kosovo in this document, whether to the territory, institutions or population, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

11. Parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia are governed by the Constitution of 2006. In 2003, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Resolution 1320 (2003) on a Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters inviting the Venice Commission, in co-operation with the OSCE/ODIHR, to prepare opinions on possible improvements to legislation and electoral practice in the Republic of Serbia. Since that date, the Venice Commission has adopted joint opinions with the OSCE/ODIHR concerning the law on parliamentary, presidential and local elections (2006), the draft law on parliamentary elections in Serbia (2009), the draft law “altering and amending the law on election of members of Parliament” (2001) and the draft law on financing political activities in the Republic of Serbia. In January 2012, the REC adopted rules of procedure for the elections of 6 May 2012.

12. Overall, the altered legal framework constitutes a credible basis for conducting democratic elections. Nonetheless, certain aspects of the electoral process require improvement. In particular, the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR had recommended that the law should be amended to compel the political parties and coalitions to define and announce the order of the candidatures on their lists before the ballot, rather than let them choose, after the elections, the candidates who would hold a seat.

13. On that score, in accordance with a 2011 decision of the Constitutional Court of Serbia and having regard to the aforementioned recommendations of the Venice Commission, the electoral law was amended in 2011 by clarifying the order of candidatures on the party lists before the poll. However, the Constitution still allows for elected members to place their mandate at the disposal of their own party. The Parliamentary Assembly’s pre-election mission was informed that the Serbian Radical Party had announced its intention to have its candidates sign a memorandum with the undertaking to pay back to the party the equivalent of €30 000 if the elected candidate appearing on its list should leave the party.

14. In 2011, the parliament enacted the law on financing of political activities which permits public as well as private financing, thereby recognising that parties need adequate resources to fulfil their role. The recently enacted law may constitute a positive step towards creating a complete modern system of financing for political activities in Serbia on condition that the Anti-Corruption Agency of Serbia (ACA) has the requisite human and financial resources to ensure suitable and transparent supervision.

15. Public financing represents approximately 8 million euros for the organisation of each national election. For the parliamentary elections of 6 May 2012, 20% of that amount was apparently shared out among all participants in the elections, with the remaining 80% to be distributed after the elections among the political parties having passed the 5% threshold and in proportion to the number of seats won. For the presidential election, 50% of the sum will be distributed among all the candidates participating in the first round and the remaining 50% between the two candidates who contested the second round.

16. The ACA is instructed for the first time to oversee the expenditure of the election contenders. At the time of the election campaign, the ACA did not find any infringements of the law but requested information on the expenditure of two political parties. The law on political activities does not require the ACA to publish its findings and does not set deadlines for the publication of its reports after the elections. However, many informants conveyed their suspicions, fearing that corruption nevertheless continued. On that subject, the latest GRECO report on Serbia, published in 2010, raised issues concerning the application of the rules for financing election campaigns, the lack of transparency in that regard and the effectiveness of penalties for infringements of the legislation. The Assembly’s ad hoc committee, in its statement after the elections of 6 May, emphasised: “Regarding the transparency of campaign financing, the PACE delegation looks forward to the report of the Anti-Corruption Agency on this issue”.

3. Electoral administration and registration of the lists and of presidential candidates

17. Serbia has a multi-tiered electoral administration: the Republic Election Commission (REC), a provincial electoral commission in Vojvodina, two electoral commissions for the conurbations of Belgrade and Niš, 160 municipal electoral commissions and 8 588 polling stations. In addition, 38 polling stations have been opened in 22 foreign countries.

18. On 30 April 2012, the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina reached an agreement on voting by the citizens of Serbia resident in Kosovo. Under the agreement, welcomed extensively by the international community, the entire electoral process in the territory of Kosovo was organised by the OSCE mission which opened 28 polling stations in Kosovo on election day, where Serbian citizens were able to take part in the parliamentary elections and in the presidential election. Next, the staff of the OSCE mission transferred the ballot papers to two

counting centres located in the towns of Raska and Vranje – in Serbia. A team of the Assembly ad hoc committee made the journey to Raska and ascertained that the electoral process had taken place in calm conditions.

19. The REC consists of a president and 16 members (and their alternates) appointed by the National Assembly. It also appoints a non-voting secretary together with a non-voting member who represents the National Statistical Office. In its extended composition, the REC also includes a representative of each entity submitting a list of registered candidates. The great majority of the interlocutors whom the ad hoc committee met expressed their support for the REC and their confidence in its operation.

20. In December 2011, the new law on the uniform electoral register came into force. It prescribes the compilation of a uniform computerised national electoral roll. For the first time, the elections of 6 May 2012 were held on the basis of this list of voters. The Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government drew up the national electoral roll on the basis of the computerised municipal electoral rolls, formerly kept by the municipal authorities and by the Ministry of the Interior according to different electronic formats. Constituents were invited to verify the listed data concerning them between 14 March and 20 April 2012. According to the REC's data, as at 3 May, 6 770 013 voters were registered on the uniform computerised national register. The LEOM of the OSCE/ODIHR nevertheless noted a certain lack of transparency in the process of compiling the electoral register.

21. The National Assembly of Serbia is composed of 250 members elected for four years in a single national constituency. Seats are allocated proportionally between the lists having gained at least 5% of the votes cast. The 5% rule does not apply to the parties of the minorities. However, the leaders of the political parties still have some latitude, admittedly limited after the change in the electoral legislation in 2011, as to their lists of candidates, in so far as the elected candidates can place their mandates at the disposal of their parties.

22. At present, in Serbia there are 89 political parties registered according to the law on political parties enacted in 2009. Some two million Serbians are members of political parties, a figure which increased by about 70 000 persons in 2012. In general, the registration of lists of candidates upheld pluralism as the REC registered 28 lists fielded by 7 coalitions (41 political parties and 2 associations), 9 political parties and 2 groups of citizens.

23. About 17% of Serbia's population declared that they belonged to the 20 national minorities at the 2002 census. The law on political parties stipulates that 1 000 members are needed to found a political party representing a national minority, whereas for an ordinary party there must be ten times more members. For the parliamentary elections of 6 May 2012, four party lists and two coalitions of national minorities were registered. Representatives of various national minorities were registered on the lists of other political parties and other coalitions.

24. As regards the presidential election, 12 candidates were registered to contest it, including the incumbent President Boris Tadić, of the Better Life Coalition; Tomislav Nikolić, Chairperson of the Serbian Progressive Party; Ivica Dačić, Minister of the Interior representing the Socialist Party of Serbia; Vojislav Koštunica of the Democratic Party of Serbia; Čedomir Jovanović of the Liberal Democrat Party. Among the presidential candidates were two women and a representative of the Hungarian minority and the Mufti of the Sandžak region.

4. Election campaign and media environment

25. The campaign opened on 13 March for the parliamentary elections and on 5 April for the presidential election. During the campaign, the political climate was generally quiet. The campaign grew more intense over the last two weeks. The issues that dominated the campaign were unemployment and socio-economic development, privatisation and the fight against corruption, European integration and, though much less so, Kosovo. On the whole, the campaigns for the parliamentary elections and the presidential election were marked by the confrontation between the two principal presidential election candidates – Mr Tadić and Mr Nikolić.

26. The ad hoc committee was informed by certain representatives of political parties and NGOs of instances of buying votes, particularly among the Roma population, above all in rural localities, misuse of administrative resources and isolated cases of intimidation of electors. In that connection, the ad hoc

committee asks the competent national authorities to do their utmost to shed light on these allegations in order to determine the responsibilities and to inform public opinion. The ad hoc committee is convinced that any recurrence of such practices on future electoral occasions must be averted at all costs.

27. Two days before the poll, some people of Albanian origin were arrested in southern Serbia – in the localities of Bujanovac, Veliki Trnovac and Breznica, one a candidate in the local elections. According to the Serbian authorities, the arrested persons were implicated in the war crimes of 2001. The ad hoc committee, without means of verifying the facts, nevertheless questions the timing of the arrest of these people, the media coverage of the event and the fact that the arrest was announced by the Minister of the Interior who was himself standing for the presidential election.

28. Serbia's media landscape is highly diversified and reflects all the trends of public opinion. The legal framework for the media coverage of the campaign is established by the law on the election of representatives and the law on broadcasting. The latter instituted a regulatory authority, the Republic Broadcasting Agency, vested with wide powers in various media-related fields. The ad hoc committee noted with satisfaction that the national broadcasting agency ensured that the political parties benefited from free and equal air time and that the rules on commercial advertising were respected. However, political communication on the Internet should comply with the code of ethics for elections.

29. One of the major problems in the media field is the lack of transparency regarding owners of media. Various interlocutors emphasised the phenomenon of close interconnection between politics and financial flows. The ad hoc committee was informed of cases of economic and political pressure applied to journalists. According to the report on media monitoring of the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM, the presidential election candidate Mr Tadić, benefited more from media coverage before the start of the official campaign. Some of the people the ad hoc committee spoke to generally expressed their doubts about the independence and objectiveness of the media.

5. Election day

30. The day of the ballot was calm. The members of the ad hoc committee visited 182 polling stations and were able to note that the ballot proceeded in an orderly manner. The voting and counting operations were conducted, on the whole, with professionalism and composure. It was reported that the co-operation between the persons making up the teams of polling station staff was flawless and that their knowledge of voting procedures was satisfactory.

31. The members of the ad hoc committee drew attention to a number of technical problems in the polling stations visited:

- design of the polling booths – particularly the flimsiness of the partitions – was not apt to ensure the secrecy of the ballot. Nevertheless, no attempt to take advantage of this deficiency was mentioned. The same problem was already reported during the monitoring of the elections in 2008;
- the presence of a considerable number of people in the polling stations, sometimes over 20 people. In fact the very open composition of the polling boards heightened the transparency and reliability of the electoral process. However, it resulted in congestion of the premises, especially during the opening of the ballot boxes and the counting;
- in general, the polling stations were not accessible to persons with disabilities. However, they could vote from home (mobile polling stations);
- ballot boxes were not properly sealed in some polling stations visited;
- cases of non-compliance with the counting procedures in certain polling stations were observed in rural localities especially;
- long queues were observed in some polling stations in the localities with an Albanian-speaking or mixed population. The electoral lists were in Cyrillic script so that not all members of the teams of polling station staff could read the voters' names, which delayed the voting process;
- in some polling stations, the electoral lists had not been compiled in alphabetical order.

32. On 7 May 2012, the REC announced the provisional results of the parliamentary elections. The parties and coalitions gained the following results: Serbian Progressive Party (Coalition "Serbia on the move") – 24.1%; Democratic Party (Coalition "Choice for a better life") – 22.4%; Liberal Democrat Party – 6.33%; Party of the Unified Regions of Serbia – 5.51%; Socialist Party of Serbia – 14.4%; Democratic Party of Serbia – 6.9%; Hungarian Coalition of Vojvodina – 1.9%.

33. At the first round of voting for the presidential election, the DS candidate, Boris Tadić, and the Serbian Progressive Party candidate, Tomislav Nikolić, received the highest number of votes: 26.7% for Boris Tadić and 25.5% for Tomislav Nikolić. The other candidates obtained the following results: Zoran Dragisic (Independent) – 21.7%; Ivica Dacic (Socialist Party of Serbia) – 15.3%; Vojislav Kostunic (Democratic Party of Serbia) – 7.7%. As no candidate won more than 50% of the votes cast, a second round was scheduled for 20 May 2012 between the two candidates totalling the most votes. The turnout at the elections was about 58%, showing the voters' interest in the ballot.

34. The ad hoc committee felt that it would not be necessary to observe the second round of the presidential election given the fact that the election day did not raise any major problems and especially since the OSCE/ODIHR limited observation mission would monitor the voting on the spot. According to the REC preliminary results announced on 21 May 2012, Tomislav Nikolić won the election with 49.55 % of the votes cast, and Boris Tadić received 47.30% of the votes cast.

35. The turnout for the second round of the presidential election on 20 May 2012 was 46.37%.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

36. The ad hoc committee concluded that the parliamentary and presidential elections of 6 May 2012 held in Serbia complied with most of the Council of Europe standards in respect of democratic elections. The citizens chose freely from a large number of parties and presidential candidates. Election day was calm. The members of the ad hoc committee visited 182 polling stations and were able to note that the poll went ahead in an orderly manner, and that the voting and counting operations were generally conducted with professionalism and composure.

37. The ad hoc committee emphasised the significance of the turnout of Serbian citizens living in Kosovo at the parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia and in that regard commended the efforts made by the international community as well as by Belgrade and Pristina.

38. The ad hoc committee noted with satisfaction that the authorities of Serbia had followed the recommendations contained in the Assembly's report on the observation of the 2008 elections. The modified legal framework constitutes a credible basis for conducting democratic elections. However, the ad hoc committee invites the Serbian authorities to improve the electoral legislation in line with the joint recommendations of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR, and to do so before the next national elections.

39. The law on financing of political activities passed in 2011 may constitute a positive step towards creating a complete modern system of financing for political activities in Serbia, on the condition that Serbia's Anti-Corruption Agency has the requisite human and financial resources to oversee their financing in a suitable and transparent fashion. The ad hoc committee considers that the law on political activities should be amended to embody the obligation for the Anti-Corruption Agency to publish its reports within a mandatory deadline after the elections, together with penalties for infringements of the rules on financing of election campaigns.

40. The ad hoc committee noted that the media coverage of the election campaign should have been more balanced. It also expressed its anxiety over the lack of transparency regarding the owners of media and the close interconnection between politics and financial flows. The ad hoc committee was informed by various interlocutors of cases of economic and political pressure applied to journalists. Not having the means to verify the facts, the ad hoc committee asks the competent national authorities to do their utmost to shed light on these allegations in order to determine the responsibilities, apply suitable penalties and inform national public opinion. The ad hoc committee is convinced that any recurrence of such practices on future electoral occasions must be averted at all costs.

41. To improve the electoral processes in Serbia further, the ad hoc committee invites the Serbian authorities to:

- generally improve the fitting-out of the polling station premises, including the technical equipment, in order to make them better suited to the conduct of the ballot;
- improve polling booth design to enhance the confidentiality of the ballot;
- make polling stations accessible for persons with disabilities;
- look into the possibility of drawing up a single electoral list in Cyrillic and Latin lettering in the localities with a mixed population to speed up the search for voters' names and thus avert congestion in the polling stations;
- draw up the electoral lists in alphabetical order in all polling stations;
- improve the quality of the seals on ballot boxes;
- arrange training for polling board members, particularly in rural localities, to improve their command of the voting procedures.

Appendix 1 – Composition of the ad hoc committee

Based on proposals by the political groups in the Assembly, the ad hoc committee was composed as follows:

- Jean-Charles GARDETTO, Head of the Delegation
- **Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)**
 - Jean-Charles GARDETTO, Monaco
 - Marietta de POURBAIX-LUNDIN, Sweden
 - Kimmo SASI, Finland
 - Stefaan VERCAMER, Belgium
 - Luca VOLONTÈ, Italy
- **Socialist Group (SOC)**
 - Josette DURRIEU, France
 - Jonas GUNNARSSON, Sweden
 - Hakon HAUGLI, Norway
 - Tadeusz IWŃSKI, Poland
 - Patrick MORIAU, Belgium
 - Indrek SAAR, Estonia
 - Lord TOMLINSON, United Kingdom
 - Zoran VUKCEVIC, Montenegro
- **European Democrat Group (EDG)**
 - Mevlüt ÇAVUŞOĞLU, Turkey
- **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**
 - Bernard MARQUET, Monaco
 - Fazil MUSTAPHA, Azerbaijan
 - Andrea RIGONI, Italy
- **European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)**
 - Serguei KOUZNETSOV, Administrator, Elections and Referendums Division
- **Secretariat**
 - Chemavon CHAHBAZIAN, Deputy to the Head of the Interparliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation Unit
 - Franck DAESCHLER, Principal Administrative Assistant

Appendix 2 – Programme for the observation of the parliamentary and early presidential elections

Friday 4 May 2012

- 08:15-08:45 Meeting of the ad hoc committee:
- Opening of the meeting and presentation of the pre-election mission by Mr Jean-Charles Gardetto, Head of Delegation
 - Statements by other members of the pre-election mission
 - Recent developments in the field of electoral legislation and the activities of the Venice Commission in Serbia, by the Venice Commission secretariat
- 09:00-09:15 Opening of the joint meeting of the International Election Observation Mission:
- 09:15-10:30 Briefing by the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission:
- Ms Corien Jonker, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM
 - Core Team Analysts
- 10:00-10:05 Welcoming remarks by Ms Slavica Đukić-Dejanović, Speaker of Parliament and Acting President of Serbia
- 10:30-11:00 Democratic Party (DS) – Mr Nenad Konstantinović, DS President of the Competent Board for Justice
- 11:00-11:30 Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) – Ms Tijana Vukomanović, SPS Vice-President
- 11:30-12:00 Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) – Mr Marko Đurić, Member of the SNS Main Board
- 12:00 -12:30 Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) – Ms Judita Popović, Member of the LDP Presidency, Vice-President of the Parliament
- 12:30-13:00 Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) – Mr Slobodan Samardžić, DSS Vice-President
- 14:30-15:00 United Regions of Serbia (URS) – Ms Suzana Grubješić, Vice-President
- 15:00-16:00 Minority issues:
- Mr Vladimir Bilandžić, Special Advisor, Confidence and Security Building Measures, OSCE Mission to Serbia
 - Mr Vitomir Mihajlović, President of the National Council of the Roma National Minority
- 16:00-17:00 – Mr Marko Blagojević, Director of the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID)
- 18:00 Reception hosted by the Italian Ambassador, H.E. Armando Varricchio

Saturday 5 May 2012

- 09:15-09:45 Ad hoc committee meeting: Deployment and practical matters
- 10:00-10:30 Mr Miodrag Petrović, member of the Republic Electoral Commission
- 10:30-11:30 Round table with media representatives
- Mr Saša Mirković, Director of the TV B92
 - Mr Zoran Stanojević, Editor, Radio Television of Serbia
 - Mr Predrag Mihailović, Deputy Executive Editor, Newspaper Blic
 - Mr Dragan Janjić, Vice-President of the Independent Journalist Association of Serbia (NUNS)
 - Ms Dragana Solomon, Office of the OSCE
- 11:30-12:30 Round table with NGO representatives:

Sunday 6 May 2012

All day Observation of the elections

Monday 7 May 2012

09:00-10:00 Debriefing meeting of the ad hoc committee on election day observations

10:30-11:30 Meeting of the Heads of delegations

13:30 Press Conference (Media Centre)

Appendix 3 – Statement by the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM)

Serbia's elections open and highly competitive, additional transparency needed

Strasbourg, 07.05.2012 – Serbia's parliamentary and early presidential elections on 6 May 2012 took place in an open and competitive environment but additional efforts are needed to improve the transparency of the election process and the functioning of the media, international observers said in a statement issued today.

Observers noted that voters were provided with a wide degree of choice between various political options and contestants were able to campaign freely. Most electoral stakeholders expressed a high degree of confidence in the professionalism of the election administration. On election day, commissions carried out their duties professionally. Certain procedural problems were noted but no serious incidents took place.

Media ownership lacks transparency and there is a need to have more balanced and analytical coverage.

The introduction of a single unified voter register was a positive step but its implementation started late and there appeared to be some lack of transparency in the compilation of the register.

"These were open and competitive elections, thanks to the legal reforms implemented over the last few years. I'm glad to say that the citizens of Serbia are moving forward on their path to building a fully-fledged democracy to face the challenges ahead," said Matteo Mecacci, the Special Co-ordinator who led the short-term OSCE observer mission.

"The elections in Serbia addressed most of the Council of Europe standards for democratic elections. The citizens made their choice freely among a large number of parties and presidential candidates. Nevertheless, the media coverage could have been more balanced. Regarding the transparency of campaign financing, the PACE delegation looks forward to the report of the Anti-Corruption Agency on this issue," said Jean-Charles Gardetto, the Head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) delegation.

"It welcomes the efforts of the international community and those of Belgrade and Prishtina which allowed the Serbian citizens of Kosovo to exercise their right to vote," he added.*

Corien Jonker, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission, said: "We were happy that the elections took place in a calm environment. We are also pleased to see that there is high confidence in the electoral process. At the same time, it is clear from our long-term observation that greater transparency is vital to maintain and further develop this confidence, which is necessary for a vibrant democracy. Here the role of citizens is key: they should insist upon greater openness from their institutions."

* All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations [Resolution 1244](#) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.