



# Information Documents

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Reports from the Council of Europe Field Offices  
and Other Outposts\*

May 2005

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\* For a more complete list of activities, see Council of Europe activities database (CEAD) – <http://dsp.coe.int/CEAD>

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# Yerevan

## 1. Political and legislative developments

1. **Opposition parties** (Democratic Party of Armenia, Constitutional Right Union, and People's Party of Armenia) formed a task group on 6 May to elaborate a plan of action, following the third inter-party meeting, which was not attended by the Coalition or the United Labour Party. Hrant Khachatryan, Chair of the Constitutional Right Union, will coordinate the task group.
2. At the Third CoE Summit in Warsaw (16-17 May) **President Kocharyan** stated that Armenia will have completed its commitments and obligations to the Council of Europe before the end of 2005. In the context of the Summit, a meeting was held between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan.
3. On 19 May the National Assembly approved the draft amendments to **the Electoral Code** in the second reading. The amendments relate inter alia to the formation of Election Commissions and the extension of the length of office for MPs (5 years instead of 4).
4. From 4 to 11 May the NA held hearings on the three **draft proposals of amendments to the Constitution** made, respectively, by the ruling Coalition, the United Labour Party and Arshak Sadoyan, MP (leader of the opposition Bloc of National Democrats). The NA adopted the Coalition draft in the first reading;
5. The **Human Rights Defender** (HRD, or Ombudsperson) submitted a report to the NA on 2 May on her Office's activities in 2004. The HRD complained that senior government officials gave false or misleading replies to the inquiries made by her Office.
6. On motion by President Kocharyan, the Constitutional Court examined the provision in the Law on the HRD empowering the latter to intervene in court sessions and request information, and found that it was unconstitutional (decision dated 6 May).
7. Armenia Liberty reported that the **police disrupted a demonstration** organised by a small group of people who came to greet Opposition leader Stepan Demirchyan and senior members of the People's Party of Armenia on 16 May in the village of Goghtn near Yerevan.
8. On 26 May the Court of Cassation declined the suit of "Meltex" LLC, the founder of **A1+ TV company**, challenging the ruling of the Commercial Court which directed A1+ to vacate the premises it occupied in a building in Yerevan (also claimed by the National Science Academy). Reportedly, the notification of the date of the session at the Court of Cassation was delivered to A1+ only an hour before the hearing, and the ruling of the court of supreme jurisdiction was read in the absence of the representative of A1+.
9. On 6 May the Government approved amendments to the **Criminal Code** which criminalise the evasion of **alternative military service**. In this context, the First Deputy Minister of Defence, Head of Chief Staff of the Armenian Armed Forces, stated on 9 May that only 6 conscripts have applied for alternative military service in the present year, whereas 24 conscripts had applied in 2004.

10. On 18 May the NA adopted in the first reading the **proposed amendments to the Law on Conducting Meetings, Assemblies, Rallies and Demonstrations**. The amendments include a list of strategic sites around which it is prohibited to hold mass events.
11. In a comment dated 16 May 2005, the Venice Commission and ODIHR concluded that, although the **proposed amendments to the Law on Conducting Meetings, Assemblies, Rallies and Demonstrations** constituted an improvement, they still presented substantial shortcomings.
12. On 19 May Armenia acceded to the **Bologna Treaty On Establishing a Common European Education Area**. The Minister of Science and Education signed the Treaty in Bergen, Norway.

## **2. Council of Europe action**

13. The Secretary General of the CoE appointed Bojana Urumova as his **Special Representative** to Armenia with effect from 1 May. Initial meetings were held with representatives of the Government, Parliament, OSCE, and non-governmental organisations.
14. Two co-rapporteurs on Armenia of the **Parliamentary Assembly's Monitoring Committee** carried out a fact-finding visit from 10 to 13 May, in order to assess the status of Armenia's honouring of its obligations and commitments. Mr Jerzy Jaskiernia and Mr Georges Colombier held meetings with representatives of the authorities, international organisations and NGOs.
15. On 11 May, a CoE expert mission took part in a working meeting on the draft amendments to the Law on **Local Self-Government** concerning inter-municipal unions.
16. A Delegation of **GRECO** commenced an evaluation visit to Armenia on 30 May. The delegation had meetings with representatives of the executive and legislative powers, the Central Bank, the Civil Service Council, Office of the Prosecutor General, as well as with Transparency International and certain local NGOs.
17. The Deputy Prosecutor General took part in the annual conference of the Prosecutors General of the CoE member States on "The relationship between public prosecutors and the police" which took place in Budapest from 29 to 31 May. The event was organised jointly by the Prosecutor General of Hungary and the Council of Europe.

# Baku

## 1. Political and legislative developments

18. On 25 May the inauguration ceremony for the **Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline** was held in the presence of the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and Azerbaijan. Other high level officials from the United Kingdom, the United States, Norway and the European Commission also participated. The inauguration marked the start of the operation to fill the pipeline with oil, a process that is expected to take some six months before the oil reaches Ceyhan at the Turkish Mediterranean coast. The pipeline project is of huge economical and political importance. It is estimated that it will help Azerbaijan to achieve an economic growth rate of around 20 % in real terms. President Aliyev in his speech pledged to use the income also to develop non-oil sectors of the economy. Prime Minister Tony Blair in a letter to President Aliyev expressed his congratulations on the inauguration of the BTC, while emphasising the importance of conducting free and fair parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan in November 2005, and he specifically mentioned the role of the Council of Europe and OSCE in achieving this end.
19. On 11 May President Ilham Aliyev issued a **decree** ordering state officials in different functions and at different levels to follow the legislation in force **to ensure free and fair elections** as well as to promote their correct conduct by various active measures such as training of election officials. The decree stipulates that any unlawful interference in the elections by public officials will be punished in accordance with legislation in force.
20. On 21 May the “Success” election bloc, consisting of the opposition Popular Front Party (PFP), Democratic Party of Azerbaijan and Musavat carried out an **unauthorised street manifestation** in the centre of Baku, demanding, inter alia, amendments to the Electoral Code, freedom of assembly and public TV. The police, who already prior to the demonstration had arrested some of the organisers, tried to break up the demonstration and prevent participants from meeting up in a central square. The authorities and the organisers issued conflicting reports, but international observers estimated that some 500 demonstrators took part. Further arrests were made and there were injuries resulting from clashes between demonstrators and police. The opposition has sought permission to hold a rally on 4 June whereas the authorities have let it be known that they will authorise rallies as of 15 June, but only in certain predefined places, such as stadiums.
21. On 4 May the first meeting of a **dialogue between government and opposition parties** took place, hosted by the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party. The discussion was held at deputy chairman level, between four government and four opposition parties. The parties declared that they were satisfied with the first meeting. The second round was hosted by the Popular Front Party on 1 June.
22. From 17 to 18 May the **OSCE** hosted a **seminar**, which was also intended **to assist government and opposition parties to engage in a dialogue**. The seminar entitled “Politics into the Future – Democracy in Azerbaijan” ended with the adoption of a nine-point joint code of conduct for political parties, in the form of a joint declaration. The points in the code of conduct, signed by the ten political parties which took part in the seminar, are of particular relevance in the run-up to the parliamentary elections.

23. President Ilham Aliyev met his Armenian counterpart Robert Kocharian on 15 May on the sidelines of the Council of Europe Summit meeting, held in Warsaw. The two Presidents discussed the **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict and agreed to meet again.
24. On 3 May the Azerbaijani authorities responsible for the investigation into the **murder of journalist Elmar Husseynov** announced the name and age of a Georgian man whom they have identified as the prime suspect. Later, on 19 May, they announced the name of a second Georgian suspect. By the end of May the two men had not yet been apprehended. It appears that the men are not known from before, which makes investigators believe they may have committed the murder on somebody else's behalf.

## **2. Council of Europe action**

25. On 25 May the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted an **action plan** to support the efforts of the Azerbaijani authorities **to improve the conduct of the 2005 parliamentary elections**. The plan has a three-fold focus: revision of the election code and assistance to the election administration; public awareness raising /voter education aiming at increasing public participation in the election process; and promoting Council of Europe standards and values through professional groups, civil society and the media.
26. A joint mission from the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Norwegian Association of Local Authorities paid a three-day visit to Azerbaijan to make a first assessment about how best to support the establishment of a **local authority association in Azerbaijan**. The mission members met relevant state authorities and NGOs. Other international organisations such as OSCE, UNDP, GTZ and IFES were also invited to meet the group for an exchange of views and experiences.
27. From 30 May to 3 June the Directorate General of Human Rights carried out a **Human Rights training course for police officers**. The SRSG delivered an opening intervention at the seminar.
28. On 31 May a second meeting was held between Azerbaijani authorities and the Council of Europe Venice Commission and ODIHR, to discuss possible amendments to the **Electoral Code**, in the light of a set of proposals for amendments submitted by the authorities on the one hand, and the Venice Commission and ODIHR experts' analysis of these proposals on the other hand. The proposed amendments did not address the more significant Venice Commission/ODIHR recommendations of March 2004, about the Electoral Code. However, some technical improvements to the electoral code were proposed by the Azerbaijani side and discussed at the meeting. The Azerbaijani Parliament is likely to adopt the corresponding amendments to the Code in June.

## **3. Other action**

29. The SRSG acted as spokesperson for the **International Legal Reform Group (ILRG)** when it met the deputy Minister of Justice, Mr Togrul Musayev, on 11 May. The ILRG is a co-ordination body comprising the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the US embassy, USAID, the American Bar Association, GTZ and UNHCR. The participants discussed concrete ways in which the ILGR can continue to assist the Ministry of Justice and related institutions with legal reform.

# Sarajevo

## 1. Political and legislative developments

30. May witnessed rollercoaster developments with regard to police restructuring. On 11 May, following the meeting with the BiH parliamentarians at both state and entity levels held in Brussels, the EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn was of the opinion that politicians in BiH had taken an important step at the meeting held on Mount Vlasic. However, by 17 May, negotiations between the 11 political parties on **police reform** in BiH in line with the recommendations of the European Commission had broken down because, according to the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, "The RS delegates were unable to conform to the three principles laid out by the European Union."
31. On the same day at a large protest **rally** in Banja Luka, unofficially estimated at 10,000 and organised by non-governmental organisations, government representatives were called on **to preserve the RS** as a guarantee for the survival of the Serb people in BiH. Ashdown concluded "What th[is] means is that the European Commission is very unlikely to say that the conditions for moving forward towards the negotiations on Stabilisation and Association have been fulfilled."
32. Also on 17 May, the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly adopted the draft law on BiH **public RTV (Radio-TV) system** / Public Broadcasting System - PBS. The Commission for Transport and Communications of the House of Representatives had earlier adopted a draft of this law with several amendments essentially providing that the Corporation of Public RTV Broadcasters would have units in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar and programmes would be produced, edited and broadcast equally from the three centres and in the three languages. The next day, however, this draft failed in the House of Peoples.
33. On 19 May the new **Croat member of BiH Presidency**, Ivo Miro Jovic, gave the Solemn Declaration enabling this State institution to hold a session in full composition after a long interval.
34. On 20 May, as foreseen, the VIth consultative task force meeting decided **against** starting of negotiations for signing of the **Stabilisation and Association Agreement** with the EU because two conditions - the police reform and the adoption of the law on Public Broadcasting System - remained unfulfilled.
35. Jovan Spajic, **Srebrenica Task Force** Chairman, reported on 21 May that he expected RS MOI would deliver detailed data on Srebrenica events from July 1995, and on 25 May NATO forces searched the house in Pale of Radovan Karadzic's wife Ljiljana Zelen-Karadzic, with the aim of collecting information on war crime indictees and persons helping them.

## 2. Council of Europe action

36. May marked the departure of Hugh Chetwynd and the arrival of Tim Cartwright, as **SRSG in Sarajevo**. In the week of 9 May, the outgoing and incoming SRSGs met

prominent local officials and members of the IC. On 25 May, the SRSB, together with the BiH Minister of Civil Affairs, opened the exhibition in Sarajevo celebrating 50 years of Council of Europe Art Exhibitions.

37. Throughout the month, developments in the field of Education were closely followed. At the request of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the CoE provided expert assistance on the latest draft of the state-level **Higher Education Law** for BiH. Given that financing has been removed from the law, it is to be hoped that this law - which is based upon Bologna Process principles - will be accepted in the near future. The CoE submitted expert remarks on the draft Framework Law for Higher Education prepared by the Ministry, which included some technical changes – which the Ministry accepted – but which generally considered the draft law to be an important step to initiate higher education reforms in BiH.
38. The IC, meeting at the World Bank BiH Headquarters on 10 May to discuss the draft Framework Law for Higher Education promoted by the MoCA, agreed on the general concept of the law. The World Bank expressed a preference to see higher education financing within the draft, which currently only foresees changing the structure of higher education financing in a second phase. At a subsequent meeting on 12 May with the Minister of Civil Affairs and Heads of Agencies (CoE, OHR, OSCE and the World Bank), the SRSB cited the 10th Monitoring Report, calling for a sequenced approach, i.e. first a law introducing important higher education reforms, and then a second phase to change financing, a strategy which the OSCE also supports. On 17 May, MP Novakovic submitted an alternative version of this Framework Law to the BiH Parliament. His draft law, unacceptable both to the relevant Ministry and the IC, foresees two higher education systems in BiH along entity lines, with a minimal role of the state. The law will go before the Constitutional and Legal Commission of the Parliament on 1 June.
39. Other **activities concerning Education** included a meeting of the Education Issue Set Steering Group where the establishment of Agencies, including the Standards and Assessment Agency, the Curriculum Agency and the Higher Education Agency, was discussed; the fourth workshop to draft Prototype Statutes for BiH universities, CoE passive participation in the selection of three (future) ENIC staff by the MoCA.; a meeting with European Commission Delegation Head of Section for Democratic Stabilisation and Social Development where the new joint CoE/EU project for higher education was discussed; a meeting with Federation and Cantonal Ministers of Education, where it was evident that there is an even stronger tendency for the B-Croat Ministers of Education to act as a block; Regional ENIC Conference, sponsored jointly by the CoE and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in Mostar; and a visit to Mostar Gymnasium, one of the 54 '2 schools under 1 roof' where some common activities are being organised and potentially a centre of excellence could be established. It is also expected that a CoE Development Bank loan will assist in the reconstruction of the Gymnasium in the autumn 2005.
40. On a more general level, there is a serious concern among the IC about the lack of action in **education reforms**. It has been suggested that the IC (CoE, OHR, OSCE, World Bank, EU, USAID, UNICEF, etc) write formally to all the Ministers of Education, asking for a progress report on the above-mentioned initiatives by the beginning of the school year.



41. In the **human rights field**, a training workshop on "Taking a case to the European Court of Human Rights" was organised in Fojnica for lawyers (CEAD 5472) and one on the ECHR and the European Social Charter was organised for civil servants in Mostar (CEAD 5517).
42. Concerning **Rule of Law and Prison Reform**, the first activity within the PACO Impact Pilot Activity for Bosnia and Herzegovina "Manual on the Practical Tools and Guidelines on Criminal Proceedings against Corruption Related Offences" was held (CEAD 9378); the Local Project Officer (LPO) held a working meeting on completion of the Questionnaire on Organised Crime with the members of the CARDS Police Working Group on Criminal Analysis and the Module 1 Coordinator. The LPO also met with the Legal Advisor of the OSCE Rule of Law Human Rights Department at which the activities of the CARDS Police and PACO Impact Projects were presented, with emphasis on activities in the field of witness protection. The planning committee of the Penal Policy Conference to be held in Sarajevo in September this year met (CEAD 11791) to develop the programme for the conference and to design a map of key contributors and participants, as well as to decide on the publicity strategy, and the CoE-supported prison staff training team delivered training for the permanent staff in the State Detention Unit and assessed competence of the staff seconded to this Unit earlier (CEAD 11741).
43. On 23 and 24 May, in the framework of the joint EC/CoE project «Support to the **Centres for Judicial and Prosecutorial Training** in Bosnia and Herzegovina», the CoE Office organised in Sarajevo a Regional Workshop on the role of judicial training for the development of the judicial systems in South East Europe (CEAD 11412). The workshop gathered representatives from Judicial Training Centres from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Estonia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Georgia, Latvia, Serbia and Montenegro and Turkey, as well as judges, prosecutors and government representatives from BiH and representatives from UNMIK and international organisations working in this field. Conclusions were adopted on the best practices and new challenges facing training for future and sitting judges and prosecutors. The event was widely covered by the local media.

### 3. Other action

44. Much of the day-to-day work of the Office takes place in the context of close and permanent collaboration with other IOs, as can be seen above. Of particular note during this month have been regular contacts and joint meetings with BiH authorities of the SRSG and the OSCE representative concerning the Ombudsman law, and a meeting with the OSCE on future co-operation in the area of history, where the adoption of the Guidelines for History and Geography Textbook Writers was discussed.

## Tbilisi

### 1. Political and legislative developments

45. US **President George W. Bush** arrived for a one-day visit to Georgia on 9 May. As a part of this official visit, the US President held separate talks with President Mikheil Saakashvili and Parliamentary Chairperson Nino Burjanadze. He also met representatives of Georgian civil society and ethnic minorities.
46. Meeting with journalists on 23 May, Russian **President Vladimir Putin** said, with reference to the possible closure of Russian bases in Georgia, that necessary conditions should be created for the evacuation of troop contingent, its accommodation on Russian territory or in some other place. He apparently meant the possible relocation of some Russian troops to Armenia. One of Russia's conditions for closing its bases in Georgia, Putin went on to say, is transit rights for Russian forces via Georgia to Armenia. On 30 May the agreement was signed between Georgian and Russian Ministers of Foreign Affairs concerning the withdrawal of Russian Military Bases by 2008, but this document has to be approved by Russian Duma.

### 2. Council of Europe Action

47. From 4 to 10 May two CoE experts visited Georgia for the purpose of the reassessment of the **penitentiary system**. They visited several prisons in Tbilisi and in the regions and also held meetings with some concerned officials, including the Minister and Deputy Minister of Justice. The SRSG organised a working dinner for the Minister and Deputy Minister and CoE experts at the end of visit, where the current situation in prisons was discussed.
48. A meeting on “the **development of Lawyers’ Ethics** and aspects of functioning of the Bar Association” was held on 4-5 May. The meeting was organised within the framework of the Council of Europe and European Commission Joint Programme by the Georgian Bar Association in co-operation with the Council of Europe Directorate General of Legal Affairs.
49. From 11 to 14 May, DGI visited Georgia to meet with the representatives of the working group on National **Anti-corruption Strategy**. The CoE representatives, including the SRSG, discussed future strategy with their Georgian partners.
50. The 4th Meeting of the Executive Board of the newly established **National Association of Local Authorities** of Georgia was held on 17-18 May in Tbilisi. The National Association was officially created on 17 December 2004 in Tbilisi on the occasion of a constituent National Forum.
51. A training course on organisational aspects of **organ transplantation** and regional co-operation in this field was held in Tbilisi from 18 to 20 May 2005. The seminar was organised by the Council of Europe Directorate General III, Georgian Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Security, Georgian Association of Transplantology and the Council of Europe Information Office in Georgia.

52. A seminar on “**youth policy orientation**” was organised in Bakuriani from 21 to 25 May by the State Department of Youth Affairs (the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia) and the National Council of Youth Organisations, in co-operation with DGIV.
53. A national workshop on the **administrative and territorial reform** was held in Tbilisi on 24-25 May 2005. The workshop was organised within the framework of the Council of Europe and the European Commission Joint Programme by DGI, in cooperation with the Parliament of Georgia. Representatives of Government and Parliament, international and local NGOs, members of the National Association of Local and Regional Authorities, as well as Council of Europe and European Commission officials participated. The SRSG delivered opening remarks.
54. Throughout month, the SRSG held a number of meetings with state officials, including representatives of the Ministry of Refugees and accommodation, representative of the Ministry for Conflict Resolution issues, etc. regarding the issue of **Meskhethian repatriation** and the conflict in **Abkhazia**.
55. On 27 May the SRSG held a meeting with MP Giga Bokeria, Chair of the Georgian Delegation to PACE and Deputy Chair of the Legal Committee of the Parliament, to discuss in particular the timetable for **fulfillment of the commitments** set out in PACE Opinion No 209 (1999).
56. On 30 May the SRSG met Mr Mikheil Machavariani, Vice-Speaker of the Parliament, to discuss the **Law on the City of Tbilisi**, election of city council and the Mayor, as well as the commitments and obligations of Georgia in front of the CoE.
57. A meeting of the National Working Group on **Anti-corruption Strategy** took place on 30 May. By Decree of the President of Georgia, CoE representative Tamara Chergoleishvili became a member of the working group.
58. The SRSG held a meeting with the President’s Special Representative for **Abkhazia**, Mr Irakli Alasania, on 31 May. The main topics for discussion were problems and possible solutions to the Abkhazian conflict.

### **3. Other Action**

59. On 25 May a **coordination meeting of donor organisations** was held in the CoE premises. The aim of the meeting was to discuss effective coordination openly and the contribution of organisations in the process of decentralisation in Georgia. The organisations present were: OSCE, EC, Urban Institute, Eurasia Foundation, USAID, GTZ, OSI, NDI. The SRSG, Resident expert Alexander Mihaylov and visiting CoE representative also attended the meeting.
60. On 30 May, the SRSG held a meeting with Mr Jonathan Cohen from **Conciliation Resources** as well as co-worker of **OSCE**. The main topic of discussion was the conflict in Abkhazia and possible means of solution.

61. The SRSG held several meetings with the **heads of the OSCE Mission and EC Delegation** to discuss a range of issues, including the situations in Abkhazia and S. Ossetia and future possible cooperation.
62. On 31 May the SRSG attended a working lunch given by **UNDP Ambassador** Mr Lance Clark, in order to meet with George Soros, who visited Georgia from 29 to 31 May. The issues discussed included the overall situation in the country and future plans of different organisations.

## Chisinau

### 1. Political and legislative developments

63. On 4 May, the Central Electoral Commission established 10 July 2005 as the date for **mayoral elections in Chisinau and in 11 other localities**.
64. On 5 May, President Voronin had a meeting with Mr Poroshenko, secretary of the Ukrainian Security and Defence Council. Officially it was declared that "the views of Chisinau and Kyiv in the **Transnistria** issue coincide". On 8 May, President Voronin went to Moscow for an informal CIS-summit; he was back in Chisinau for Victory Day.
65. The Prosecutor-General initiated a probe into allegations of an attempted **sale of Alazan rockets** with radioactive warheads by a "security ministry" officer in Transnistria.
66. Russia's Ambassador to Moldova greeted "the president of the Moldovan Transnistrian republic" Smirnov, on the occasion of the "60th anniversary of the victory over fascism". The Helsinki Committee sent a letter to the Moldovan MFA, soliciting a reaction on this.
67. More than 100 **Moldovan villagers** again picketed the Russian Embassy on 11 May, demanding Russia to press on Tiraspol to let them work on their lands. They have stated their intention to appeal to the ECHR against Russia. 600 peasants allegedly have signed the appeal. Re-integration Minister Sova and Speaker of Parliament Lupu had a meeting with the villagers on 19 May. Mr Lupu promised that the state would help to compensate for the farmer's losses.
68. On 13 May, the Centre for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption submitted to the General Prosecutor the **Urechean case** of abusing his position. Also on 13 May, Parliament appointed delegations to 10 international parliamentary organisations, excepting that to PACE. The debate on nominating Mr Urechean continues.
69. On 16 May, **President Voronin** took part in the CoE Summit in Warsaw, meeting the Secretary General and signing three CoE Conventions.
70. The Mediators and representatives of Chisinau and Tiraspol convened in Vinitza (Ukraine) on 16 and 17 May. OSCE-facilitated negotiations between the Moldovan and Transnistrian sides concerning the **Latin-script schools** have been carried out throughout – without a final result yet.
71. On 18 May, Chisinau Municipal Council decided to liquidate the municipal **Press Agency "Info-Prim"**. The following day, the Government approved the decision on liquidation of "Nezavisimaia Moldova" Newspaper State Enterprise and on 1 June – to liquidate "Moldova Suverana".
72. On 31 May, Mr Jacobovits de Szeged, the EU Permanent Representative in Moldova, met President Voronin and confirmed the EU's intention to join the **Transnistrian settlement** work.

## 2. Council of Europe Action

73. On 13 May a seminar on **police ethics** was organised by DGI (CEAD 9639).
74. The Chairman of the CoE High Expert Group on **census monitoring**, Mr John Kelly, made a follow-up visit to Moldova from 14 to 18 May. After meeting with Mr Valcov, Head of National Statistics, Mr Kelly issued a press release and gave interviews to newspapers.
75. On 18 May, the SRSG attended a Coalition 2005 Conference on the **Election Process**.
76. From 19 to 20 May a group of 3 experts from DG 1 organised a Round Table on the National Training Strategy and Best Practice Programme for **local authorities**. A Working Group/Task Force was set up for the coming 12-month project.
77. From 19 to 22 May, as a follow up to the February 2005 round table, **PACO Moldova Project** organised an event on drafting the Law on Financing Political Parties and Election Campaign. A working group was created with the Ministry of Justice, Central Election Committee and Center for Combating Economic Crimes and Corruption. CoE expert Marcin Walecki advised on drafting regulations for political financing and discussed international standards and best practices. The Ministry of Justice will present a first draft of the law to the PACO Project by 6 June.
78. From 23 to 27 May DGI, Department of **Crime Problems**, Technical Cooperation Unit organised the In-Country Assessment Process, meeting senior prosecutors, CCECC officers and media representatives.
79. On 23 May, together with the JP coordinator, the SRSG met Mr Marian Lupu, Speaker of the Parliament, on future cooperation with CoE.
80. The SRSG gave an interview to the Independent Press Association on 24 May on the **situation of the media**, commenting on recent decisions to close down a state newspaper.
81. Together with the Heads of the Diplomatic Corps, the SRSG participated in a joint **observation of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border** - the segment of Transnistria - on 25 May.
82. A fact-finding visit of **PACE Co-Rapporteurs for Moldova** took place from 24 to 28 May. They met the President, the Speaker, political leaders, the PM and various ministers, the Prosecutor General and senior judicial officers, media and NGOs. They travelled to Gagauzia and Transnistria. The SRSG participated in the meetings.
83. The SRSG attended a Seminar organised on 31 May by the NGO "Lawyers for Human Rights" in cooperation with the CoE, which focused on **defamation in the press** and protection of dignity and professional reputation in European and Moldovan judicial practice.
84. During this month, staff reinforcement to implement the **EC/CoE Joint Programme** was finalised. Programme Manager, a resident legal expert, a task manager for the Access to

Social Rights Component and a Programme Coordinator for the PACO Programme are now working together with SRSG.

### **3. Other Action**

85. On 3 May 2005, together with OSCE and European Union Embassies, the SRSG released a statement on the occasion of **World Press Freedom Day**.
86. On 11 May, representatives from the SRSG's office, the OSCE and US Embassy discussed aspects of drafting the **broadcasting law** with Vice-Speaker of Parliament Mr Rosca.
87. On 4 May, a representative from the SRSG's office attended a roundtable on **Defamation, Qualitative Journalism and Democracy** organised by the Independent Journalism Centre and on 5 May, the SRSG attended the public debates "The Audiovisual of Moldova: challenges and stagnation", organised by APEL, where the same organisation presented 3 draft media laws.
88. On 12 May, the SRSG spoke at a donors' meeting on **Post-Election Assistance** issues.
89. On 18 May an international conference with the NGO Transparency International and the Academy of Public Administration "For **transparent, accountable and democratic governance**" took place in Chisinau. CoE DG I expert John Jackson delivered an opening speech at the Conference.

## Belgrade

### 1. Political and legislative developments

90. At the third session of its first regular session in May, the **Serbian Parliament** adopted a resolution establishing the office of the Commissioner for information and elected the ninth member from Kosovo of the Broadcasting Council. The Parliament also elected members of different parliamentary committees, the Republic Agency for Telecommunications and members of the National Education Council. In addition, the Assembly voted on the amending of the Constitutional Charter in order to implement the agreed changes to the **Belgrade Agreement**.
91. Nomokanon, a law student association, organised on 17 May in the premises of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade a public debate on "**The truth about Srebrenica**". Speakers of the event denied war crimes or tried to justify the genocide. In front of the Faculty a protest rally was organised by citizens and a few NGO's. In contrast to this recent event, the NGO, Humanitarian Law Centre, will organise the Conference "**Srebrenica – Beyond Reasonable Doubt**" on 11 June. The event is supported by a number of Embassies and international organisations, including the CoE.
92. The Serbian Government has submitted to the parliament a **draft law on Ombudsman**. The draft law was amended in accordance to a number of experts' comments early on submitted by CoE and OSCE. The Parliamentary committee in charge of adopting the final text of this law has been informed by the Belgrade Office of the remaining comments not taken into consideration by the current draft.
93. Serbian officials reached an agreement on **common platform on Kosovo**, which was later on presented by the Head of Kosovo Coordination Centre, Nebojsa Covic, to the UN Security Council on 27 May. Covic stated that basic human rights of Serbs and other non-Albanians are not protected. At the same time, he stressed the Belgrade's openness to dialogue with **Kosovo** provisional institutions. Some of the Serb leaders from Kosovo, observed that the platform, which can be summarised with the slogan "more than autonomy less than independence" is a political statement without any substance.

### 2. Council of Europe action

94. A meeting took place in the Belgrade Office on 9 May with the Anti-corruption council, the NGO Transparency International and PACO Director on the preparation of a pilot project that should follow the endorsement of the **National Strategy on the fight against corruption**.
95. A **co-ordination meeting with OSCE** was held on 12 May 2005, where the two Organisations exchanged information on their respective activities particularly in the areas covered by the recent EU Feasibility Study. Enhancement of mutual coordination and cooperation in specific fields has been agreed.
96. The Belgrade office met with Mr Jovan Ratkovic foreign policy adviser of President Tadic on 25 May 2005, to discuss the present **political situation in Serbia** and state union, in the context of CoE programme, including "**facing the past**" activities.



97. A meeting with the OSCE Law enforcement department was held on 26 May 2005 in order to discuss future **CoE/OSCE co-operation** end of 2005 and 2006. An agreement on a number of activities was reached (CEAD No. 11795).
98. The Belgrade office, together with OSCE, met on 30 May the **Minister of Education** and his senior staff in order to solve common issues with this Ministry. In particular, the CoE is concerned about the **lack of communication** and discontinuity in contact persons, following organisational changes and staff cut in the Ministry. This situation is seriously jeopardising the effectiveness of CoE co-operation with the Ministry (in particular CEAD N° 9930). The Minister promised to look into these questions as a matter of urgency.
99. CoE has continued to assist the MoJ in drafting the new **Criminal procedure code**, including the discussion of the report and recommendations from the last experts meeting on ECHR and new CPC to the working group (CEAD No. 5725).

### **3. Other action**

100. The Belgrade office participated in a co-ordination meeting on the promotion of **multiculturalism in Vojvodina**, organised by the OSCE and Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, 4 May 2005.
101. CoE participated in the international conference on **Children's Ombudsman**, organised by the Children's Cultural Centre in Belgrade on 9-10 May 2005.
102. Broadcasting Agency and the Ministry of Capital investments organised a session on the **national frequency plan** on 10 May 2005, attended by relevant international organisations, including CoE.
103. CoE presented its standards on **minority rights protection** at a seminar organised by OSCE for different Republican and state union Ministries on 19 May 2005 in Belgrade.
104. At the National Conference on **access to justice**, organised by DFID (UK) on 26 and 27 May in Belgrade, CoE presented its recommendation in this area.
105. On 28 May 2005, the Belgrade office took part in the public presentation of the **National strategy for EU accession**, drafted by the Serbian office for EU integration. This document outlines concrete areas, which are supposed to be improved, before a decision on the starting of the EU Stabilisation and Association Process is taken.
106. The Belgrade office participated in Conference organised by the Centre for Antiwar Action dealing with the **protection of human rights in domestic criminal proceedings**. A number of judges and prosecutors complained about some provisions of the draft Criminal Code.

# Podgorica

## 1. Political and legislative developments

107. The Main Board of the Democratic Party of Socialists adopted a Decision for preparation of **referendum on independence** at its session on 5 May. According to the President of the Republic, Mr Filip Vujanovic, the Referendum on Independence will be organised next year in April at the latest, even if it causes certain delay in the process of European integration.
108. During the 19 May Session of the Parliament for vote of confidence in the Government, Prime Minister Mr Milo Djukanovic offered the opposition initiation of dialogue for achieving consensus on the **referendum rules**.
109. The text of the **Declaration for Association to the European Union** was harmonised by the Parliamentary Board for European Integration with consensus achieved with the strongest opposition actor Socialist People's Party on 26 May. The adoption of the Declaration in the Parliament will not be supported by the pro-Serbian opposition parties SNS, NS and DSS.
110. The early **local elections** in the Municipality of **Budva** held on 22 May ended with an absolute victory of the pro-independence bloc of political parties. The coalition DPS/SDP candidate for Mayor, gained 62.5% while the opposition candidate received 37.5%. The distribution of the municipal assembly seats is as follows: coalition DPS/SDP 19, coalition SNP/SNS/NS 11, LP/B Forum 1 and SRS 1. The turn-out was 78.2%.
111. Changes and **amendments to the Constitutional Charter** were adopted by the Government at its session of 19 May and should be adopted by the Parliament in June/July.
112. The **Public Prosecutor** submitted his **Annual Report** to Parliament on 18 May stating that the investigation judiciary failed to complete 4,532 cases last year, which slowed down the access to justice. There were six indictments for organised crime, out of which four for trafficking in human beings.
113. At its 84th session held on 26 May, the Agency for Broadcasting adopted a Decision on Minimum Programme Standards and the Rules of Procedure on Advertising and Sponsorship of Electronic Media.
114. A Protocol for cooperation in relation to the **return of IDPs and refugees to Kosovo** was signed by the Montenegrin Government, UNMIK and UNHCR on 19 May.
115. To be followed next month: Parliamentary debate concerning the adoption of Changes and amendments to the Constitutional Charter, the Declaration for Association to the European Union and possibly the Law on Free Access to Information.

## 2. Council of Europe action

116. The office coordinated and assisted the preparation of a Draft Strategy on the **Use of Special Investigative Means** which was presented by the CARPO Working Group taking part in the regional seminar held in Tirana on 18 and 19 May. The Working Group was given the task of making an assessment of further training needs in relation to the proper use of Special Investigative Means. (CEAD 11793)
117. The completion phase of drafting the **Strategy on Witness Protection** was facilitated. (CEAD 11403)
118. A Plan was designed for launching a Pilot Project to strengthen the legal, institutional and operative capacity of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for **Combating Organised Crime**. An expert mission is scheduled for June and the purchase of equipment for the Office of the Special Prosecutor is underway. PACO Impact.
119. The CoE experts' opinion on the **Draft Code of Ethics for Civil Servants** was handed over to the Ministry of Justice, aimed at bringing the draft Code into compliance with Council of Europe standards. Organisation of a round table on the draft Code is envisaged for 24 June. (CEAD 11827)
120. The **CoE/EC Joint Programme** on "Expert assistance on relevant norms of initial training and on the **reform of the curricula of the judicial training institutions** in Serbia and Montenegro" provided expert analyses on the draft Law on judicial training and professional skills development to the Ministry of Justice. The aim is to enrich the legal system insofar as pre-service and continuous training of judges and prosecutors are concerned. An expert meeting on the draft Law will be carried out on 2 and 3 June. (CEAD 5638)
121. A Round Table on "**Free Access to Information** as a Democratic Right" for members of the Working Group framing the media legislation, public administration representatives and media community was organised jointly with the OSCE Office in Podgorica on 18 May. The Expert's comments on the final Draft Law on Free Access to Information were submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Media. A **joint CoE/OSCE Experts meeting** on this piece of legislation will be conducted on 9 June.
122. Within the framework of the Second Joint Initiative of the CoE and the EAR in the media field, a Seminar on **freedom of expression and information**, and self-regulatory mechanisms for young media professionals was held on 21 and 22 May. This should better acquaint young journalists with the substance of the ECHR, procedural guarantees and the standards on objective, impartial and balanced informing. (CEAD 7421)
123. The expert group drafting the Report on **compatibility of legislation and practice with the Revised European Social Charter**, finalised the agreed changes and amendments to its second part and submitted the entire text to the CoE. The Report will be published and a conference organised in June for presentation to all relevant parties.
124. A Policy Seminar on **Human Rights and Civic Education** for representatives from the Ministries of Education of Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as teachers involved in the previous training process took place on 19 and 20 May. The

seminar resulted in a Joint statement calling on the authorities for improved mutual cooperation and implementation of education policy conducive to the objectives of human rights and civic education. (CEAD 5788)

125. A study visit to Germany was prepared for representatives of the Ministry of Justice and prison authorities to be conducted from 5 to 11 June. The beneficiaries will be able to become familiarised with the other member State's experience in **human resources and prison management** issues and to apply them in their every-day practice. The curriculum for training of prison managerial staff should be reviewed in the second half of the year.

### 3. Other action

126. An **EC/CoE/OSCE meeting** to consider the latest developments, including the positive assessment of the feasibility study, and their impact on the political reality, was organised on 12 May.

127. A **joint CoE/OSCE meeting** with Mr Dragan Djurovic, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, on 17 May reviewed current and defined future priorities for co-operation in the fields of organised crime, implementation of legal provisions for witness protection, drafting the law on access to secret files and reform of the system of police education.

128. A meeting with Minister of Justice Mr Zeljko Sturanovic concerning co-operation priorities about the strengthening of the **capacity of public administration** and further building up of the legal system, took place on 19 May.

129. On 31 May the Head of Office participated in a working meeting with OSCE Ambassadors, representatives of UNDP, GUMM, UNHCR and the US Consulate to discuss the **present political situation** and its possible influence on the future state status. This was one of a series of **regular meetings organised by the OSCE Office**.

130. Meetings to **exchange information with** counterparts in the **OSCE** were conducted in relation to organised crime and corruption, prison reform, media and Ombudsman. Such meetings are regularly organised, according to the schedule of activities, in order to ensure coordination and avoid needless duplication.

## Pristina

### 1. Political and legislative developments

131. Two issues were high on the agenda in Kosovo during the whole month of May: **decentralisation** and the **meeting of the UN Security Council**, which debated the current situation in Kosovo and the Report of the SRSG, Mr Søren Jessen-Petersen.
132. After several postponements, the **decentralisation process** seems to have **started** – after lively debates in the Assembly, an informal meeting of the Steering Board was held, followed by meetings of Working Group on Legislation and on Pilot Projects. It should be noted that representatives of the Kosovo Serbian List participated in all three meetings, which should be considered a step forward.
133. On 27 May, after examining the report of the SRSG, the UN Security Council gave the green light for the **comprehensive review of standards**. This process should last a few months and its outcome would condition the beginning of negotiations on Kosovo's future status.
134. The SRSG's highly energetic attempts to call the first meeting of the **consultative political Forum** with the participation of the major Kosovo political party leaders failed again, due to the reluctance of opposition leaders who wish the Forum to be a decision-making body and not just consultative.
135. The inaugural meeting of the Implementing Committee for the **Reconstruction of Religious Monuments**, damaged during the March 2004 riots, took place at the Council of Europe Secretariat Office in Pristina on 9 May. This meeting follows the March 2005 signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Minister of Culture (PISG).
136. A donors conference was organised by UNMIK for the **reconstruction of Roma Mahala** – a compact settlement of Roma in Mitrovica, the home for more than 8,000 Romas, which was totally destroyed last year in March, on the pretext that they had sided with the Serbs against Kosovo Albanians. Unfortunately, up to now no commitments have been made for this extremely vital project.
137. The Assembly adopted the “**Suppression of Corruption Law**” and, following that, the SRSG issued a Regulation on promulgation of the adopted Law. This will enable the Council of Europe to resume its activities in the framework of the PACO Impact project for 2005.
138. An indictment has been filed against a UNHCR official in Kosovo for sexual offence against minors. UNMIK spokesman Neeraj Singh declared at a press conference that the Pakistani officer has been charged with the abuse of persons under the age of sixteen years.
139. Seven bodies have been found in a pit near the city of Malishevo. The **exhumed bodies** have not been identified, but according to the head of Office for Missing Persons, Jose-Pablo Baraybar, these might be bodies of some Serbs who went missing in 1998.

140. Several times different sources announced possible meetings between President Tadic and President Rugova but also between Prime Minister Kostunica and Prime Minister Kosumi, but despite all the efforts deployed by the international community and personally by the SRSG, no result had been achieved so far.
141. During May, Kosovo was visited by the Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moller and also NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

## **2. Council of Europe action**

142. **PACE Rapporteur**, Ms M.Tritz visited Kosovo in order to prepare a report on the current situation in Kosovo, to be debated during the third part of ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly in June 2005.
143. The CoE Office concentrated its efforts on organising the first meeting of the Implementing Committee (IC) for the **Reconstruction of Religious Monuments**, chaired by CoE expert, Ms Emma Carmichael. After technical discussions and drafting of Terms of Reference of the IC, work has started on issuing tenders for the reconstruction.
144. The Head of Office participated in several events, including addressing the Europe's Day Celebration meeting held in Pristina, and attending the Pristina Political Studies Institute seminar in Mamrovo (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), where he made a presentation on the Council of Europe's structure and activities, as well as the Office's activities in Kosovo.
145. **Local Governance Reform** in Kosovo remains a high priority. Representatives of the Council of Europe office participated in the inaugural meetings of the Working Group on Legislation and the Working Group on Pilot Projects. The Council of Europe will continue its support for the reform especially as pertains to these two areas.
146. The Office, in cooperation with Department of Justice organised a successful "in house" seminar with participation of decision-makers and members of the Working Group on **financial investigations** to develop amendments to the legislation and **guidelines for practitioners**. The seminar was held at DoJ HQ on 5-6 May.
147. The Working Group on **Special Investigation Means** (SIM), of which the Local Project Officer is a member, has prepared a first draft of the implementation strategies on SIMs. The draft was further finalised in the Tirana Regional Seminar held on 18 May. The SIM Working Group on is working on finalising the draft strategy which will be submitted to the CoE in Strasbourg during June 2005.
148. At the request of UNMIK, the Council of Europe has reviewed the **draft Law on Police**, to assess its compatibility with European human rights standards.
149. Following the signing of the Technical Agreement on the **Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities** in September 2004, UNMIK has submitted the Official Report on the implementation of the Convention in Kosovo. The report is due to be examined by the Advisory Committee in November 2005.

150. The Office of the Prime Minister of the PISG has requested the CoE's assistance in preparing a **Human Rights Strategy for Kosovo**. The CoE office is at present member of the Working Group in charge of drafting the above Strategy.

151. **General Security Situation**

152. The overall security situation was calm, although UNMIK Situation Centre reported a slight increase of street crime, in particular against internationals.

# Tirana

## 1. Political and legislative developments

153. The first **opinion poll** ever made in Albania **on voters' intentions** in the next elections was published by the National Democratic Institute (US) with the following result: Democratic Party 42%, Socialist Party 34%, Socialist Movement for Integration 11% and National Movement for Development (NMD) 4%.
154. On 12 May, the Parliament rejected a proposal by the Democratic Party aimed at making impossible **tactical voting**, also called "Dushk" phenomenon.
155. On 19 May, the draft law on **digital broadcasting** was also rejected in a very confused and chaotic sitting. Its adoption should be submitted to the next elected Parliament.
156. **President Alfred Moisiu addressed the People's Assembly** on the last day of the 16th Legislature, pointing out achievements as well as weak points. He was critical of the way the balance and separation of powers were missed by the outgoing parliamentarians and of the energy lost in "verbal political battles". President Moisiu also stressed the importance of the upcoming elections and the need for media to be a "tough judge of anyone, especially of whoever does not respect the law or violates the ethics of this election".
157. The **Democratic Party** of Mr Sali Berisha has concluded an **alliance** with the New Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the Christian-Democrat Party and the Liberal Democrat Party in the parliamentary elections.
158. In a statement made on 24 May, Leka Zog I (NMD) excluded any possibility of an alliance with the Socialist Party before or after elections
159. President Moisiu met on 31 May with the Heads of Police and of the National Intelligence Service (SHISH) to request their absolute **neutrality in the electoral process**.
160. In an obvious **breach of the Code of Conduct** signed by the political parties in front of President Moisiu in April, two anti-advertisements aiming respectively at Dr Berisha and at Mrs Joana Nano, the wife of the Prime Minister, were published in daily newspapers. Both initiatives were publicly condemned by the leaders of the supposedly "beneficiary" parties. Daily "Korrieri", which was one of the publishers, acknowledged its error of judgement.
161. The Albanian Ambassador to the United States, Fatos Tarifa, was dismissed by President Moisiu after evidence was brought against him of soliciting bribes. The former ambassador has not yet returned to Albania, allegedly for health reasons.
162. Minister of Finance Arben Malaj warned that the cost (over 2 billion Euros) of compensation in the **property restitution process** would put the state budget in crisis. He said that only in the long term could the issue be addressed.



163. After the sale in 2004 of the Savings Bank, the Albanian government continues the **privatisation process** of Albanian state companies by selling 76% of Altelekom to a Turkish consortium for 151 million USD.

## 2. Council of Europe action

164. The Special Adviser took part in **several** of the below-mentioned **seminars of Joint Programmes and CARDS-Police activities**. He opened a regional Conference on gender issues organised in Shkodra in the framework of the Democratic Leadership Programme. He also chaired a seminar on "**Media and elections**" organised **in co-operation with the OSCE Presence** in Albania. The seminar produced a Code of Conduct for Albanian Media during the electoral campaign.

165. On two occasions, the Special Adviser was invited to a morning programme of the public television broadcaster to speak on the **Council of Europe presence in Albania** and on its contribution to the electoral process. He also spoke before the Albanian Youth Parliament in an event organised by the CoE Information Office for the Second Youth Summit.

166. On 3 May, the 7th Conference on **Legal and Judicial Reforms in Albania** was held in Strasbourg. Its aim was to assess progress in the implementation of the Second Action Plan of Albania and define further cooperation accordingly.

167. From 9 to 14 May, teachers from the two Law Faculties of Tirana and Shkodra and of the Law Department at the University of Vlora visited corresponding university institutions in Naples. They had the opportunity to exchange views and opinions on different issues related mainly to the **Bologna Process**.

168. **Training sessions** were organised from 11 to 12 May, for Albanian judges on "Means of defence against the enforcement of decision", at the Magistrates School; from 24 to 25 May, training of trainers for full-time and part-time teachers of the Albanian Magistrates School; from 26 to 27 May, for teachers of the Law Faculties on a "General overview of civil proceedings in Europe".

169. On 19 May, the meeting of the 3rd Steering Committee of **Joint EC/CoE Programme IV** took place in Tirana under the joint chairmanship of Ambassador Lutz Salzmann, Head of the EC Delegation in Tirana, and of the CoE Special Adviser. The Steering Committee is meant to assess the degree of implementation of the Joint Programme in its various activities and phases.

170. On 5-6 May, a training seminar on "**Freedom of information law and its role in prevention and fight against corruption**" was held with representatives from local government bodies. This is the first of two training events for the purpose of explaining issues related to the implementation of the law while strengthening good governance and transparency. The second training event will be organised for members of the judicial administration (court clerks) in mid-September 2005.

171. A regional seminar was held in Tirana, on 18 and 19 May and was attended by six delegations from Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, "the former

Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Kosovo under UNMIK administration, and Albania. This seminar was devoted to confronting the **national strategies on the “use of Special Investigative Means** in accordance with human rights standards and practices”. Particular stress was put on the use of undercover agents.

### 3. Other action

172. See above under CoE action for co-operation with both OSCE and EC Delegation.

# Skopje

## 1. Political and legislative developments

173. On 13 May the Minister of Justice announced the creation of a working group, composed of representatives of all political parties and the domestic observer NGO "Most" to prepare **amendments to the election legislation** along the lines of the comments and recommendations issued by ODIHR, by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the international community following the local elections of March and April this year.
174. On 18 May the **national association of municipalities** ZELS held its constitutive assembly following the local elections in March and April. On this occasion, the Association elected its new President: Andrej Petrov, young mayor SDSM (Social-Democrat ruling party) of Karposh, a neighbouring municipality of Skopje took over from Mr Goran Angelov (VRMO-DPMNE opposition party). Mr Petrov was also designated as head of the national delegation to the Congress of the Council of Europe. The outgoing and new Presidents both attended the Annual Assembly of the Congress from 31 May to 2 June in Strasbourg.
175. On the same day the Parliament unanimously adopted the Proposal for Constitutional amendments related to reform towards **a more efficient and independent judiciary**. The text addresses some key issues, such as the appointment and mandate of judges and prosecutors, the composition of the new High Judicial Council and the rules of majority for adopting the legal changes. The Government will have to prepare and submit the relevant draft amendments within 60 days.
176. On 24 May the Minister of Justice stated that as a Law on **Cooperation with the Hague Tribunal** has not yet been adopted, "experiences of other countries will be used, especially the Croatian one's". On 19 May, the Parliament postponed the debate on the Draft Law on Cooperation with The Hague Tribunal for the Fall session.
177. On 23 May a poll conducted in April by the International Republican Institute showed that 47% of respondents expressed **dissatisfaction with the implementation of the decentralisation process**, whereas decentralisation is seen as a key prerequisite for EU membership. Two months after the election of the new mayors and local councils, some municipalities such as the City of Skopje are still facing delays and difficulties in forming their municipal councils. The high level of indebtedness of several municipalities is also a current and broad concern expressed by mayors in furtherance of the transfer of competences due to start officially on 1 July.
178. On 26 May the President of the Parliament Mr Jordanovski expressed the will to have a **Law on Parliament** aimed at making the institution financially independent.
179. On 27 May the Government adopted the **Draft Law on Use of Communities' Flags**, which regulate the use of the flag of the community representing the majority in a municipality alongside the country flag. The text concerns 16 municipalities where the Albanian community is the majority one, two municipalities where Turks are in the

majority and one Roma municipality. The coalition ruling parties agreed that the majority means 50% of inhabitants of the municipality. The European Union Special Representative and the US Embassy welcomed the text as “fully consistent with both the spirit and the letter of the Ohrid Framework Agreement”.

180. On 20 May the UNHCR Representative in Skopje stated that conditions do not exist for the **return of Kosovo refugees**: “There are security problems“ and “UNHCR cannot promote repatriation”. The statement was made after the Government announced that repatriation of part of the more than 2,000 refugees will start by the end of the year.

181. On 29 May President Crvenkovski publicly reasserted strong support for the **Macedonian Orthodox Church** in its current dispute with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which decided to grant autonomy to the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric and to appoint Jovan Vraniskovski as its Bishop.

## 2. Council of Europe Action

182. On 6 May the Resident Expert took part in a Round Table on “**Implementation of the European Standards in the judicial system** towards its forthcoming reforms”, jointly organised by the Law Faculty “Iustinianus Primus“ in Skopje and the Council of Europe Information Office. The event was part of the project: European Integration of the Social, Legal and Political System, conducted by the Law Faculty over the past years. Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski and Minister of Justice Ms Mladenovska-Gjorgjevska officially opened the session. The Resident Expert delivered a speech on the Council of Europe Recommendations in the matter of human rights and legal standards.

183. On 13-14 May a workshop on **Measures for the Prevention and Repression of Corruption at the Local Self-government level** took place in Ohrid in cooperation with the State Anti-Corruption Commission as part of the project PACO IMPACT. The participants adopted recommendations on the measures to prevent and repress corruption in the financial management of local self governments.

184. On the occasion of the 100th Jubilee for the **recognition of Vlachs’ national rights** as a separate nation within the Ottoman Empire, on 15 May the Information Office of the Council of Europe received a plaque awarded by the Vlach community in the country. The plaque rewards the Council of Europe for its achievement in the development and the protection of the culture of Vlachs in light of recommendation 1333 adopted by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in 1997.

185. On 18 May the Resident Expert attended the constitutive session of the National Association of Municipalities ZELS, which elected its new President and its new Executive Committee.