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## **Observation of the early parliamentary elections in Serbia (16 March 2014)**

### **Election observation report**

Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau

Rapporteur: Mr Pedro AGRAMUNT, Spain, Group of the European People's Party

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### **1. Introduction**

1. The Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly, at its meeting on 27 January 2014, decided to observe the early parliamentary elections in Serbia, subject to the receipt of an invitation and confirmation of the date, and to constitute an ad hoc committee composed of 22 members and the two co-rapporteurs of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee). The Bureau also authorised a pre-electoral mission. On 30 January, Mr Nebojša Stefanović, President of the National Assembly of Serbia, invited the Parliamentary Assembly to observe the early parliamentary elections. The Bureau of the Assembly, at its meeting on 31 January, approved the composition of the ad hoc committee (see Appendix 1) and appointed Mr Pedro Agramunt (Spain, EPP/CD) as Chairperson.

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, “[w]hen 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. The pre-electoral delegation visited Serbia from 18 to 21 February 2014 to evaluate the state of preparations and the political climate in the run-up to the early parliamentary elections on 16 March 2014. The multiparty delegation was composed of Mr Pedro Agramunt (Spain, EPP/CD), Head of the Delegation, Mr Igor Ivanovski, (“the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, SOC), Ms Ingebjørg Amanda Godskesen (Norway, EDG) and Mr Grigore Petrenco (Republic of Moldova, UEL). Unfortunately, one of the members of the pre-electoral delegation and the two co-rapporteurs responsible for monitoring of Serbia were unable to take part in the visit.

4. During its visit to Serbia, the delegation met Prime Minister and Interior Minister Ivica Dačić, Nebojša Stefanović, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Serbian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Executive Director of the Council of the Republic's Broadcasting Agency, the Deputy Head of the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), the members of the Republic Electoral Commission (REC) and the leaders and representatives of the main parliamentary caucuses. Meetings were also organised with representatives of the diplomatic corps, of international organisations and missions and of civil society and the media.

5. During its two-day visit to Serbia, the pre-electoral delegation found that the preparations for the elections had been smooth, while noting that these early parliamentary elections, called less than two years after the previous ones, might have an impact on major democratisation reforms launched by the authorities. The delegation welcomed the publication of the first report of the Anti-Corruption Agency on the financing of the last election campaign, and encouraged the Agency to continue its work to improve the transparency of parties' campaign funding and their accountability. The pre-electoral delegation also called on political parties and entities to refrain from misusing administrative resources.

6. The ad hoc committee operated in the framework of an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) alongside the observation mission of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the limited election observation mission (LEOM) of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE (OSCE/ODIHR).

7. The ad hoc committee met in Belgrade from 14 to 17 March 2014. In particular, it met leaders and representatives of lists of entities and political parties contesting the election, the head of the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM and his assistants, a member of the Republic Electoral Commission, a member of the Anti-Corruption Agency as well as 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 10 teams which observed the elections in Belgrade and its outskirts, as well as in the following regions and municipalities: Novi Sad, Voevodina, Pancevo, Smederevo, Obrenovac, Niš and Vranje. In all, the members of the ad hoc committee visited more than 121 polling stations on the day of the ballot.

9. The ad hoc committee concluded that the early parliamentary elections held in Serbia on 16 March 2014 offered voters a genuine choice, were conducted on a sound legal basis, and fundamental freedoms were respected throughout the campaign. Fighting corruption was one of the main issues of the election campaign and a major concern for citizens. The media environment was pluralistic, but lacked journalistic independence and transparency in media ownership. The statement published after the elections is reproduced in Appendix 3.

## **2. Legal framework**

10. The conduct of the parliamentary elections is primarily regulated by the Law on the Election of Representatives that has been amended twice since the elections in 2009 and 2011. The legal framework for parliamentary elections also includes the Law on Political Parties, the Law on Financing Political Activities (LFPA) and the Broadcasting Law, and is supplemented by the regulations, decisions, and rules of procedure of the REC.

11. In March 2011, the Venice Commission adopted two Opinions on the Draft Law on "altering and amending the Law on election of Members of Parliament" of the Republic of Serbia and on the revised draft law on financing political activities of the Republic of Serbia (LFPA).<sup>1</sup> A new Law on Financing Political Activities was adopted on 14 June 2011; it entered into force on 22 June 2011 and was first tested following the "all in one" elections of 6 May 2012 (presidential, parliamentary, local and regional Vojvodina elections).

12. The National Assembly of Serbia is composed of 250 members elected for four years in a single national constituency. Seats are allocated proportionally among the lists having gained at least 5% of the votes cast. The 5% rule does not apply to the parties of the national minorities. The introduction of a quota system in 2011 has improved the access of women to parliament. 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,

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1. Documents CDL-AD(2011)005 and CDL-AD(2011)006.

in so far as elected candidates can place their mandates at the disposal of their party. Moreover, a constitutional provision still allows an elected MP to “irrevocably put his/her mandate at the disposal of the respective political party”.<sup>2</sup>

13. In the parliamentary elections of 6 May 2012, the results were as follows: Serbian Progressive Party (Coalition “Serbia on the move”) – 73 seats; Democratic Party (Coalition “Choice for a better life”) – 67 seats; Liberal Democrat Party – 19 seats; Party of the Unified Regions of Serbia – 16 seats; the coalition of Socialist Party of Serbia, Party of United Pensioners of Serbia and United Serbia – 44 seats; Democratic Party of Serbia – 21 seats; Hungarian Coalition of Vojvodina – 5 seats; five seats were obtained by small national minorities parties’ lists.

14. According to the 2011 census, there are 20 national and linguistic minorities in Serbia. The self-declaration made during the same census indicates that Serbs represent 83.3% of the population, the Hungarians – 3.53%, the Bosnians – 2.33% and the Roma – 2.05%. The Albanian population boycotted the 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.

15. As regards the funding of the election campaign, the Anti-Corruption Agency has a key role to play in monitoring the implementation of the 2011 Law on the Financing of Political Activities, as noted in the Assembly’s election observation report in May 2012 and by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).<sup>3</sup> The Assembly report on the parliamentary elections of 5 May 2012 underlined that this new law constitutes a positive step towards creating a completely 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 Assembly report also recommended that the law on the financing of political activities be amended “to embody the obligation for the ACA to publish its reports within a mandatory deadline after the elections, together with penalties for infringements of the rules on financing of election campaigns”.<sup>4</sup>

16. The Parliamentary Assembly’s delegation was informed that the Anti-Corruption Agency had deployed 142 observers in Belgrade and in other parts of the country to monitor the funding of different events during the election campaign by the political parties. The Agency has also the power to monitor cases of possible misuse of administrative resources. In this regard, the Assembly’s pre-electoral delegation, last February, called on political parties and entities to refrain from misusing administrative resources and stated that, on election day, special attention should be paid to ensuring that all voting procedures are respected, especially in rural areas.

17. The funding of the election campaign is regulated by the Law on the Financing of Political Activities. The total amount of private donations that can be collected from private sources is no longer connected to public funding; the law instead establishes a cap on private donations per individual donor/per year. In particular, private donations are limited to 20 times the average monthly salary (namely approximately €7 000) for individuals and 200 times the average monthly salary (namely approximately €70 000) for legal entities. Donations for election-related activities can be doubled in an election year (regardless of the number of elections held in a given year). All donations must be recorded; donations exceeding an average monthly salary (approximately €350) must be disclosed. The deadline for reporting campaign finances has been extended to 30 days after the publication of election results in order to give a better picture of the total amount of income generated and expenditure disbursed during campaigns.<sup>5</sup>

18. The Anti-Corruption Agency presented its first Report on Control of Political Entities related to the financing of the election campaign to the public in 2012 and a report on the oversight of Financing of Political Entities in December 2013. During the May 2012 campaign, only a third of the registered political entities and parties submitted a report, as required by the law, on the election campaign expenditures.<sup>6</sup>

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2. Documents CDL-AD (2011) 005 and CDL-AD(2011)006.

3. [Greco RC-III\(2012\)16E](#), paragraph 60.

4. See the conclusions of the Assembly’s Ad hoc Committee on the observation of the 2012 parliamentary elections, [Doc. 12938](#), paragraph 39.

5. [Greco RC-III\(2012\)16E](#).

6. It should be noted that, in December 2013, the co-rapporteurs of the Assembly on the obligations and commitments of Serbia had encouraged the Serbian authorities to reinforce and upgrade the legal framework to ensure that sanctions are applied to those who do not comply with the law, and that these sanctions will have a deterrent effect, document AS/Mon (2014) 01 rev.

19. As regards the announcing of the results: Article 85 of the law requires the REC to publish the results of the elections. However, Article 85 does not require the REC to publish a table showing the results broken down for each polling station. A table of results showing the breakdown for each polling station would enable the parties to ensure that the results are correctly entered from the polling station results protocol.

20. The election legislation does not regulate the status on international and domestic observers. The REC may accredit observers in its instructions, although these instructions are adopted for each election separately and do not provide lasting legal grounds for observation.

### **3. Electoral administration, registration of the voters lists and candidates**

21. The elections were administrated by a two-tier system, comprising the REC and polling boards. In its extended composition, the REC comprises 75 members, including deputies of members and a representative of each entity submitting a list of registered candidates. The permanent members of the REC are appointed by the National Assembly for a renewable term of four years. For the early parliamentary elections of 16 March, 8 387 polling stations were open in Serbia. In addition, 35 polling stations were open in 20 countries abroad.

22. On 1 March, the REC published the voters lists. For the 16 March elections, the total number of electors on the voters lists was 6 765 998. In the parliamentary elections of 2012 the voters lists contained 6 770 013 electors. The number of voters per polling station should be no less than 100 and no more than 2 500. 7 169 voters were registered to vote abroad. A total of 6 801 161 ballot papers were printed, including a reserve of 0.5% over the number of registered voters. Ballot papers were printed in both Latin and Cyrillic scripts for the polling stations in areas with a significant presence of linguistic minorities.

23. Each proposed candidate list should be supported by the signatures of at least 10 000 voters, with each voter able to support only one list. The national minorities' parties need 3 000 signatures to be registered. The verification of each signature is subject to a fee of around €0.43, putting the total cost of verification of 10 000 signatures at around € 4 300. According to some interlocutors, this amount seems excessive and, in general terms, the procedure seems too bureaucratic.

24. On 5 March, the REC published 19 electoral lists of entities and parties with the names of 3 020 candidates as admitted to parliamentary elections: 7 coalitions, 8 political parties and 4 groups of citizens. The registration of lists of candidates was inclusive and respected the political pluralism.

25. For the 2012 elections, the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina reached an agreement on voting by the citizens of Serbia resident in Kosovo.\*<sup>7</sup> A team of the Parliamentary Assembly ad hoc committee made the journey to Raska and ascertained that the electoral process had taken place in calm conditions.

26. As regards the early parliamentary elections on 16 March 2014, the Parliamentary Assembly delegation was informed that a similar agreement had been reached between Belgrade and Pristina with the support of the European Union on holding the early parliamentary elections in Kosovo as well. The delegation welcomed the agreement, which allows citizens of Serbia resident in Kosovo to vote. The elections were organised with the assistance of the OSCE, as was the case in 2012, primarily due to security reasons, but also in order to facilitate the holding of the elections regarding technical issues. Ninety polling stations were opened in 17 municipalities on voting day.

### **4. Election campaign and media environment**

27. On 29 January 2014, the President of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolić, signed the decree to dissolve the National Assembly and hold early parliamentary elections on 16 March. The election campaign started on 29 January.

28. The early parliamentary elections on 16 March were the tenth since the introduction of the multiparty system in Serbia in 1990. Seven of the ten parliamentary elections were early elections. The Parliamentary Assembly has observed all parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia since 2000.

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7. \* All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

29. After the dissolution of the National Assembly, political life was dominated by parties' negotiations concerning pre-election coalitions. The Republic Electoral Commission set the deadline of midnight on 28 February for the presentation of electoral lists.

30. According to the Government of Serbia, the early parliamentary elections were necessary in order to provide wide support for reforms and the modernisation of society. The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), until now in governmental coalition with Prime Minister Dačić's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), has sought to capitalise on its support after starting European Union membership talks on 21 January and in that manner to consolidate its majority in the parliament. The normalisation of relations with Kosovo is a key European Union condition for further accession steps. According to recent opinion polls, 51% of Serbs support membership of the European Union, compared to 22% against.

31. The main issues of the election campaign, *inter alia*, seemed to be the rise in unemployment, its rate having reached 20.1% in a country with a population of 7.1 million and where the average monthly salary is estimated at around €350; the fight against corruption and organised crime and the European Union accession negotiations.

32. On 4 February, the ruling SNS party was the first to submit its list entitled "Aleksandar Vučić – Future we believe in" to the REC, it included 250 candidates, mainly from the SNS, plus candidates from allied parties: the New Serbia, the Social Democratic Party of Serbia, the Serbian Renewal Movement, the Movement Force of Serbia and the Movement of Socialists, and also a few independent candidates. The electoral platform of the coalition was based on the questions of economic development, social justice, the fight against corruption, European integration and the diplomatic solution of the Kosovo issue.

33. On 5 February, Prime Minister Dačić's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) presented its own list including United Serbia (JS) and the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (PUPS). The electoral platform of the SPS was similar to those of the SNS.

34. The main opposition parties formed the following electoral blocs:

- The bloc led by Dragan Đilas, leader of the Democratic Party (DS), composed of the DS joined by the New Party, led by former DS member, deputy of the parliament Zoran Živković, the Alliance of Croats in Voivodina and others. This bloc conducted its campaign on the issues of social justice, humanism and equality and European integration;
- The bloc led by Boris Tadić, former DS leader, composed of his New Democratic Party (in the process of being set up), the League of Vojvodina Social-Democrats (LSV), Together for Serbia (ZZS), and also the Democratic Union of Vojvodina Hungarians, the Bosnian bloc and the Greens of Serbia;
- The bloc led by Čedomir Jovanović, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), composed by the LDP, together with the Social Democratic Union and the Bosnian Democratic Alliance of Sandzak. The bloc conducted its campaign on the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration, the acceptance of the new realities in Kosovo and the modernisation of the State and society;
- The Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) of the former President of Serbia, Vojislav Koštunica, was against integration with the European Union and NATO, in favour of military and political neutrality and for relaunching economic and political relations with Russia.

35. For the parliamentary elections on 16 March 2014, five party lists and two coalitions of national minorities were registered. Representatives of various minorities were also recorded on the lists of other political parties and coalitions. The majority of the Albanian parties decided to boycott the elections. In this regard, the Parliamentary Assembly's pre-electoral delegation, during its visit to Belgrade last February, regretted that most of the Albanian parties had decided to boycott these elections.

36. The majority of interlocutors noted that the election campaign had been calm and peaceful, but that isolated cases of election-related violence had been reported. Some concerns were raised that several parties in power misused state resources at local level, and there were reports of intimidation of voters, especially public sector employees.

37. In this regard, on 28 February, the Ombudsperson of Serbia, the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal data Protection, and the Anti-Corruption Agency issued a joint statement asking the contestants to respect the legislation, to refrain from misusing public resources and not to conduct aggressive campaigns.

38. 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 ranging powers in various media-related fields. During the pre-electoral visit to Belgrade last February, the Parliamentary Assembly's delegation was informed that, according to official statistics, the political parties did not all receive equal airtime at the beginning of the election campaign. In this regard, the Republic's Broadcasting Agency assured the delegation that equal free airtime would be allocated to the political parties, and that the rules on commercial advertising would be respected. The delegation called on all political parties to refrain from influencing the editorial line of the media.

39. According to media monitoring report of the OSCE/ODIHR limited election observation mission, the election campaign media coverage was diverse and reflected all the trends of public opinion. One of the major problems in the media field is the lack of transparency regarding ownership of media. In their press release issued after the 16 March elections, the Parliamentary Assembly's delegation pointed out that "the media environment was pluralistic, but lacked journalistic independence and transparency in media ownership."

## 5. Election day

40. Election day was calm and peaceful. The members of the ad hoc committee visited 121 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 in a calm atmosphere. It was noted 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.

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

- a number of polling stations were late in opening;
- isolated cases of family voting;
- the presence of a considerable number of people in the polling stations, which were often small. The very open composition of the polling boards heightened the transparency and reliability of the electoral process, but resulted in congestion of the premises, especially during the opening of the ballot boxes and the counting;
- the design of the polling booths – particularly the flimsiness of the partitions – was not conducive to ensuring 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 and 2012;
- 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;
- isolated cases of non-compliance with the counting procedures in certain polling stations were observed, mainly in rural localities.

42. On 24 March 2014, the Republic Electoral Commission announced the official results of the early parliamentary elections. The parties and coalitions gained the following results: Coalition of the Serbian Progressive Party ("Aleksandar Vučić – Future we believe in") – 158 seats; Coalition of Socialist Party of Serbia – 44 seats; Democratic Party – 19 seats; Coalition of New Democratic Party – 18 seats; Hungarian Coalition of Vojvodina – 6 seats; Party of democratic action of Sandzak – 3 seats; Party of democratic action of Riza Halimi – 2 seats. The turnout at the elections was 53%, in Kosovo the turnout was 33.17%.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

43. The ad hoc committee concluded that the early parliamentary elections held in Serbia on 16 March 2014 offered voters a genuine choice, were conducted on a sound legal basis, and fundamental freedoms were respected throughout the campaign. Election day was calm and peaceful and that the ballot proceeded in an orderly manner.

44. The ad hoc committee noted that the election campaign was calm and peaceful. However, it regrets that there are a few recurrent problems from one election to another: isolated cases of violence, misuse of administrative resources at local level, cases of intimidation of voters, particularly public sector employees.

45. The modified legal framework constitutes a sound legal basis for conducting democratic elections. Nevertheless, the ad hoc committee invites the Serbian authorities to improve the election legislation and its full application according to the Parliamentary Assembly resolutions and in close co-operation with the Venice Commission in the following fields:

- to reinforce the transparency concerning media ownership and the legal mechanisms of protection of journalistic independence;
- to improve the Law on the Financing of Political Activities to make more efficient the follow-up of the reports on election campaign expenditures and to reinforce the transparency of funding of political parties taking into consideration the experience of early parliamentary elections of 16 March 2014;
- to amend the Law on the Election of Representatives in order to introduce provisions on the status of international and domestic observers.

46. To further improve some technical aspects of the electoral processes, the ad hoc committee invites the Serbian authorities to:

- improve the general fitting-out of 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 secrecy of the ballot;
- make polling stations accessible for persons with disabilities;
- 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 of the Assembly, the ad hoc committee was composed as follows:

Pedro AGRAMUNT,\* (Spain, EPP/CD), Head of the Delegation

- **Group of the European People’s Party (EPP/CD)**
  - Pedro AGRAMUNT,\* Spain
  - Viorel BADEA, Romania
  - Giuseppe GALATI, Italy
  - Foteini PIPILI, Greece
  - Kimmo SASI, Finland
- **Socialist Group (SOC)**
  - Ferdinando AIELLO, Italy
  - Igor IVANOVSKI,\* “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”
  - Luc RECORDON, Switzerland
  - Kostas TRIANTAFYLLOS, Greece
- **European Democrat Group (EDG)**
  - Reha DENEMEÇ, Turkey
  - Ingebjørg GODSKESEN,\* Norway
- **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**
  - Andrea RIGONI, Italy
  - Hirakli CHIKOVANI, Georgia
  - Ionuț-Marian STROE, Romania
- **Group of the United European Left (UEL)**
  - Grigore PETRENCO,\* Republic of Moldova
- **Venice Commission**
  - Owen MASTERS, expert
- **Secretariat**
  - Chemavon CHAHBAZIAN, Deputy Head of Secretariat, Interparliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation Division, Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly
  - Franck DAESCHLER, Principal Administrative Assistant, Interparliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation Division
  - Danièle GASTL, Assistant, Interparliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation Division

\* Pre-electoral mission (19-20 February 2014)



## Appendix 2 – Programme of the election observation mission (14-17 March 2014)

### Friday 14 March 2014

- 09:30-10:30 Meeting of the PACE ad hoc committee:
- Briefing on the pre-electoral mission, by Mr Pedro Agramunt, Head of the Delegation
  - Briefing by members of the pre-electoral mission
  - Briefing by Ms Antje Rothmund, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade
  - Briefing on election legislation, by Mr Owen Masters, expert from the Venice Commission
  - Practical and logistical arrangements, Secretariat

### Joint parliamentary briefing: PACE–OSCE-PA

- 11:00-11:15 Opening of briefing programme by heads of parliamentary delegations
- 11:15-11:30 Interventions by heads of international offices in Serbia
- Acting Head of OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ms Paula Thiede
  - Head of the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade, Ms Antje Rothmund
- 11:30-12:45 Briefing by the OSCE/ODIHR limited election observation mission
- Ambassador Boris Frlec
  - Core team analysts
- 14:30-15:00 Democratic Party (DS), Ms Darija Šajin and Mr Vladimir Todorić
- 15:00-15:30 Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Ms Dijana Vukomanović
- 15:30-16:00 Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), Mr Marko Đurić
- 16:30-17:00 Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), Mr Slobodan Samardžić
- 17:00-17:30 New Democratic Party (NDS), Mr Nenad Konstantinović
- 17:30-18:00 Minority issues round table:
- Mr Nenad Čelarevic, National Programme Officer, Democratization Department, OSCE Mission to Serbia
  - Ms Srđan Šajn, MP, Chairperson of the Roma Party
  - Mr Riza Halimi, Chairperson of the Party of Democratic Action (Albanian)
- 18:00-18:30 Mr Nemanja Cocic, Anti-Corruption Agency

### Saturday 15 March 2014

- 10:15-11:00 Ms Tamara Stojčević, Republic Electoral Commission
- 11:00-12:00 Round table with civil society representatives:
- Ms Sonja Licht, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (BFFE)
  - Ms Sonja Biserko, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights
  - Mr Paul Prosocki, International Republican Institute
  - Mr Milan Antonijević, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM/BKVF)
- 12:00-13:00 Round table with media representatives :
- Mr Miloš Rajković and Ms Jelena Kolo, Republic Broadcasting Agency
  - Ms Vesna Dobrosavljević, TV B92

- Mr Zoran Stanojević, Radio Television of Serbia
- Mr Dragan Janjić, NUNS (Independent Journalist Association of Serbia)

13:00-13:15 Meeting with drivers and interpreters

Afternoon Deployment of teams for the regions

**Sunday 16 March 2014**

Observation of the elections (07:00-20:00)

**Monday 17 March 2014**

08:30-9:30 Debriefing meeting of the PACE ad hoc committee

09:30-10:30 Meeting of the Heads of the IEOM delegations

13:30 Press conference

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

#### **Serbia elections: a genuine choice and fundamental freedoms respected**

The 16 March 2014 early parliamentary elections offered voters a genuine choice, were conducted on a sound legal basis, and fundamental freedoms were respected throughout the campaign, international election observers said in a statement issued today. The observers also highlighted the need for some further legal reform and increased media pluralism.

“Serbia conducted truly democratic elections, with a wide range of options for voters and effective procedures. The inclusive and transparent manner in which this vote was conducted is praiseworthy,” said Roberto Battelli, the Special Co-ordinator who led the short-term OSCE observer mission. “Voters and representatives of political parties, alike, expressed a high degree of trust in the electoral process – something all citizens can be proud of.”

Election commissions at all levels performed their duties efficiently and professionally and met legal deadlines, and the Republic Election Commission (REC) adopted its decisions in sessions that were open to the media and accredited observers.

“We were particularly impressed that the high standard of Election Day procedures was in evidence not only in Belgrade and other large cities, but also in villages and rural areas,” said Luigi Compagna, the head of the OSCE PA delegation. “This uniformity is crucial for democratically administered elections and for the enfranchisement of all voters.”

The media landscape is diverse, with a large number of public and private outlets, but the range of opinions offered was limited by the influence exerted on media by political parties in power, including through public funding. The lack of transparency in media ownership remains a concern.

Both public and private television stations offered extensive coverage of the elections in a variety of formats, mostly in a neutral tone, but critical analytical reporting and voter education content were lacking.

“Fighting corruption was one of the main issues of the election campaign and a major concern for citizens. The newly-elected parliament should take tangible measures to address this problem,” said Pedro Agramunt, the Head of the PACE delegation. “The media environment was pluralistic, but lacked journalistic independence and transparency in media ownership.”

The legal framework is in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments, and other international standards, although certain recommendations from previous elections remained unaddressed. Some aspects were improved through by-laws issued by the REC, the statement said.

“I hope this election allows the Serbian authorities to develop the political will needed to proceed with reforms necessary to bring legislation further in line with OSCE commitments and recommendations,” said Ambassador Boris Frlec, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission. “The next four years should give the authorities ample opportunity to move forward.”

In general, the campaign was low-key and peaceful, although isolated incidents of election-related violence were reported. Some concerns were raised that different parties in power misused state resources at the local level, and there were credible reports of cases of intimidation of voters, especially public sector employees.

While the political finance law provides an adequate framework for party activities, the lack of transparency of sources remains a concern. The legal framework establishes limits on annual private contributions for the campaign, but not for campaign expenditures.

A number of national minority parties registered their electoral lists either in coalitions with other minority parties or jointly with national parties and coalitions. Some safeguards were introduced to prevent the abuse of affirmative measures by political entities that do not represent national minorities, in line with previous recommendations.