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Mr Jean-Claude Mignon

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe
Avenue de l'Europe
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Dear Sir,

This autumn will see presidential elections in two Eastern Partnership (EaP) states: Azerbaijan in October and Georgia on October 27. The elections will be monitored by teams of local and international observers including the highly professional Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) as well as observers from various parliamentary assemblies including the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

Past practice has shown that many elections in EaP fall short of European standards. Thus the quality, professionalism and lack of bias of the observer teams is very important if the assessment of the conduct of the vote is to be fair.

Local non-governmental activists specialising in election monitoring from the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum as well as ordinary voters in both Azerbaijan and Georgia will be looking to international observers and especially to teams from European parliamentary assemblies for a fair appraisal of the elections in their countries. This must happen if the credibility of these parliamentary bodies is not to fall in Azerbaijan and Georgia and support for democratic practice is not to be eroded. A failure to be fair will undermine the principle of free and fair elections which is the crucial element of the reform process in the Eastern Partnership countries.

Already there are signs that this trust has been undercut. In Armenia after presidential elections last February young demonstrators at a press conference organised to publish the results of election monitoring by OSCE/ODIHR and parliamentary observers from the EP and PACE protested that the observers were merely presenting a biased picture of the election.

Thus it is important that the observer teams selected for the autumn elections in Azerbaijan and Georgia should be composed of politicians of the highest standards of honesty and fairness and who are courageous enough to report on what they themselves see and on what they are told of the conduct of elections by reliable local observers.

A report published last year by the European Stability Initiative (ESI) entitled "Caviar Diplomacy" describes the failure of PACE to adequately report on the shortcomings of the last presidential election in Azerbaijan in 2010. It would be a tragedy if elected representatives from PACE were to fail, once again, to adequately assess the conduct of the forthcoming election in Azerbaijan this year.

There is an added concern in Georgia. Here, parliamentary observers are more often than not allied to the parties contesting the presidential elections. Loyalty to their party allies in Georgia could cloud their judgement on whether European standards are adhered to by the various actors in the election.

PACE has already chosen the team leader for elections in Azerbaijan and Georgia. Soon after the summer break the PACE Bureau will be choosing 30 representatives who will go to Azerbaijan and Georgia. I am sure that you do not need to be reminded that the quality of the people chosen to observe elections will shape the image of Europe's democratic institutions in the eyes of Eastern Partnership societies. The performance of the observers from these institutions will be closely watched by voters in these countries. I appeal to you to ensure that suitable observers are chosen from PACE. The credibility of Europe's parliamentary assemblies, including PACE, is at stake.

Yours sincerely,

Krzysztof Bobinski

Co-chair, Steering Committee, Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership