

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the sending of EU "democracy witnesses" to the FRY**

The General Affairs Council meeting on 18 September requested the National Parliaments of the Member States of the EU to send "democracy witnesses" to the FRY to evaluate the elections of 24 September on the basis of internationally recognised standards.

The Parliaments of the Member States responded to the General Affairs Council's request by designating a total of 25 "democracy witnesses".

Their role was to be:

- to provide to the European Union with the testimony of elected representatives from our countries on the conditions under which the elections in the FRY are to be held;
- to demonstrate to men and women who want democracy in the FRY, at a key moment for the future of their country, the solidarity of Europeans, in the spirit of the message to the Serbian people issued by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on 18 September;

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- to gather information from independent media, independent observers, NGOs, opposition parties and their representatives on the polling office committees which will count the votes.

It was understood that these "democracy witnesses" had to be in a position to accomplish their mission in complete freedom and without hindrance of any kind.

The Members of Parliament in question applied to the Yugoslav consular services for visas. No visas have been issued.

With less than 48 hours to go before the elections, this absence of response is evidence of Belgrade's refusal to enable these Members of Parliament to fulfil their mandate in complete freedom and without hindrance of any kind.

Consequently, their mission has no longer any point. The European Union will draw the necessary conclusions.
