

ELECTIONS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE DONOR COORDINATION MEETING no.2

20 March, 2008, 10:00

Central Election Commission (CEC) (119, V.Alecsandri str.)

AGENDA

1. Presentation of Central Elections Commission activities and tour of the house. Follow-up on study visit to Baltic states – Iurie Ciocan, Secretary, Central Elections Commission
2. Update on actions undertaken by other participants
3. Comments to the Terms of Reference for the UN Joint Needs Assessment
4. Any other business

Participants:

Eugen Stirbu	Central Elections Commission
Iurie Ciocan	Central Elections Commission
Renata Lapti	Central Elections Commission
Kaarina Immonen	UN Resident Coordinator
Simion Terzioglo	IOM
Alexandru Mocanu	IOM
Jenő Kudrjávcev	Hungarian Embassy
Andreas Johansson	SIDA
Ylva Sörman Nath	SIDA
Blake Chrystal	USAID
Ina Pislaru	USAID
Stela Leuca	USAID
Paolo Berizzi	EC Delegation
Alexandru Albu	EC Delegation
Oleg Chirita	EC Delegation
Radivoje Grujic	Council of Europe
Sorin Mereacre	Eurasia Foundation
Vitalie Vremis	UNDP
Irina Cebotari	UNDP

Meeting Notes

CEC Secretary, Mr. Ciocan, has welcomed participants and proposed to have a tour of the building to see working conditions of CEC.

1. Presentation of Central Elections Commission activities and tour of the house. Follow-up on study visit to Baltic States.

During 10 – 14 March, 2008 CEC Secretary and four representatives of the Parliament's fractions have visited Lithuania and Estonia to meet CEC members

of these countries and learn their experience in managing electronic voters' register. Mr. Ciocan appreciated UNDP project support for funding this visit, which is the first stage of the process to develop and put in place similar systems in Moldova. He mentioned that Moldova's CEC has already established some collaboration links with Baltic States' CECs since they advanced much in using electronic systems in the election process.

Ms. Kaarina Immonen, UN Resident Coordinator, thanked CEC representatives for the opportunity to be in CEC's working environment, to discuss the problems it faces and to hear about successful experience in collaboration with Baltic States.

Mr. Ciocan talked about CEC's intention to implement the project on electronic voters' register in Moldova by 2009 elections (see more details in the Notes from the Meeting of 14.02.2008). CEC used Baltic States' experience but the concept developed for Moldova has some specifics. For example, in Baltic States electronic register is under control of the Ministry of Interior, while in Moldova it could not be accepted by politicians and therefore it is proposed to keep the register under CEC. Mr. Ciocan has emphasised that the biggest challenge for the project is its implementation timeframe. To address this CEC daily communicates with Parliament to speed up approval of the draft concept sent to Government and Parliament in mid 2007.

The following questions regarding the project concept were raised:

- Is it possible to finance the project and start activities before it is approved by the Parliament?
- How the voters' register will address Moldova's citizens living abroad?
- How will the population living in the Transnistrian region and willing to vote will be included in the register?
- If the register is not in place by 2009, what does CEC plan to do to enhance the quality of the voters' lists, since their quality was one of the biggest issue during last years elections?
- How will CEC act in case of anticipated parliament elections?
- After 2007 elections, how have been OSCE recommendations reflected in CEC's activity?

It was mentioned that in principle the Electronic Voters' Register project has already a legal status since it was approved by CEC and also is in accordance with the Electoral Code and the law on national registers. Nevertheless, in order to be implemented and financed, the Parliament approval is required. Only after a formal approval some of the activities could be covered by the state budget. This approval is needed also to start up activities, which requires involvement of other state institutions. The concept of voters' register was developed in collaboration with representatives of the Ministry of Informational Development, who ensured its correspondence to other registers already used. Moreover, voters' register data is to be based on the data imported from the register of citizens. This will allow to better keep track of changes in number of voters and to give possibility to vote to all citizens with this right despite their residency. This refers also to Moldova citizens who are abroad both legally and

illegally. As to Transnistrian region, there is no difference comparing to other Moldova citizens. Once a person gets the passport of the Republic of Moldova and has the right to vote he is recorded in the voters' register. The register will also include data about all Moldova citizens who still hold old soviet passports.

Voters' register is planned to solve the issue of voters' lists, which were not always complete and correct. The responsibility to review and update the voters' lists has been with local public administration authorities. They have to present updated lists to CEC annually on March 1. There are cases when old lists are used. Also some lists include only citizens living in a village but not all those who have residency there. These lead to a need for additional lists. Nevertheless the errors in the lists are around 3-4%, which is in accordance with international practice. In addition the use of voters' register will exclude the possibility for double voting and there will be no more need for additional control like stamp in identity card.

In case that the voters' register is not in place by 2009 or in case of anticipated elections, CEC is still ready to organize elections at an acceptable level, since the procedure is clearly described in the Electoral Code.

Moreover, changes to Electoral Code have been proposed by CEC based on OSCE recommendations after local elections 2007. The new version of the Code reflects the majority of OSCE recommendations and has been already approved by Parliament in first reading and should be in place by 2009 elections.

2. Update on actions undertaken by other participants

With reference to collaboration of CEC with donor community the following questions were addressed and issues discussed:

- What are CEC's needs for 2009 elections, besides the electronic register of voters?
- Will CEC address additional official requests to donors for assistance?
- Update from the CEC?

CEC needs support mostly in voters education and increasing professional level of the electoral commission staff. There are about 20,000 persons who act as commissions' members during elections, but the majority of them are representatives of political parties and being changed from one election to another can not ensure continuity and high qualification. Previously the same persons were appointed by local public authorities as electoral commissions' members during several elections. They got experience and provided qualified assistance. To address this problem, CEC includes in its plan for 2009 elections creation of three regional training centres (in North, South and Center) for the members of electoral commissions. This activity is also in line with OSCE recommendations.

As to civic education, CEC has requested support in raising public awareness about the need to use information technologies in election process and address concerns about the security of the system.

Significant support in these domains is offered within the new Joint Programme of the European Commission and Council of Europe "Support to Free and Fair Elections" launched by the Council of Europe to provide trainings to representatives of election administration, political parties, media and voters. CEC has already addressed requests for assistance to other donors during bilateral meetings, but is ready to provide any official documents necessary to launch new initiatives. Mr. Ciocanu expressed CEC's interest and hope for further collaboration with donor community.

The Council of Europe representative has used the opportunity to present the new regional project covering:

- support in implementation of election legislative framework
- assistance to mass-media
- voter education and trainings

Starting from June, Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe should approve pre-electoral assistance program to Moldova, which will be complementary with this Joint Programme in all three components mentioned below.

3. Comments to the Terms of Reference for the UN Joint Needs Assessment

UN Resident Coordinator has briefly informed the participants about the timing of the UN Joint Needs Assessment Mission on Electoral Assistance due to start on 14 April, 2008. The participants were invited to comment within one week from the date of the meeting to the Terms of Reference for this mission. Ms. Immonen has also announced that donor coordination meetings will be organized for the duration of the mission.

Ms. Immonen then closed the meeting by thanking the participants and especially the CEC for hosting it.