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Or. Engl.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

in co-operation with

THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

and

THE INTERPARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

14TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE
OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES
“OPERATIONAL ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES
FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS”

Monday and Tuesday, 15-16 May 2017

St Petersburg
Tavricheskiy Palace, Shpalernaya 47

CONCEPT PAPER



The 14th European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies will focus on how to ensure the functionality of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) as a key element to ensure democratic elections. The conference will focus on the work done by Electoral Management Bodies, their structure, strengths and possible weaknesses. It will therefore deal not only with their structures but also with their composition as well as with the way they function. Operational EMBs require enough human and financial resources to be able to organise comprehensive electoral cycles in a transparent and independent manner. Moreover, to ensure democratic elections, the institutions in charge of organising elections have to remain impartial. Both 'operational Electoral Management Bodies' and 'democratic elections' are thus inextricably linked.

On **Monday, 15 May 2017 morning**, the topic of the **first plenary session** will be "Functional Electoral Management Bodies". The session will deal with good practices to improve the functioning of Electoral Management Bodies.

Three working sessions will follow. Participants will have the opportunity to choose the working session of their interest, as the sessions will be held simultaneously and will all relate to the main topic of the plenary session:¹

How to ensure efficient Electoral Management Bodies?

Ensuring efficient EMBs implies both strong internal structures and an efficient functioning of such structures. When speaking about internal structures of EMBs, their composition, notably the political balance in the membership of politically-appointed EMBs is of the utmost importance for ensuring efficient EMBs. Gender and national minorities' representation regarding EMBs' membership, inclusiveness of the decision-making process, EMBs' budget and the role of new technologies in the administration of EMBs are also interesting avenues for discussion on the internal functioning of EMBs.

How to ensure visible and interactive Electoral Management Bodies?

EMBs' internal and external communication, vis-à-vis other domestic institutions, international institutions and the public (how to ensure that all citizens are reached?) will be the core issues to be debated in this working session. Participants of this working group will also usefully debate the co-operation between EMBs and other governmental bodies, such as statistic offices, audit offices, that could assist EMBs' operations. The role of internet and the social media and the relations with mass media are also interesting topics that may be debated.

How to improve legislation in order to secure functional Electoral Management Bodies?

Participants in this third working group will discuss the legislation regulating EMBs' duties. It will also be useful for this group to debate the possible regulatory role of EMBs and how they may have a significant part to play in implementing and interpreting the electoral legislation while organising elections and instructing election commissions at subordinate levels. We also consider it interesting to discuss the potential involvement of EMBs during electoral reforms initiated by law-makers. Similarly, the use of reports from international and citizen election observers following elections as a useful basis for law-makers willing to improve electoral legislation should be usefully discussed during this session.

¹ The working sessions following the second and third plenary sessions will follow the same format and will relate to the topic of their respective plenary sessions.

On **Monday, 15 May 2017 afternoon**, the **second plenary session** will cover the topic: “Professional Electoral Management Bodies”. The objective of this session is to exchange good practices regarding EMBs’ professionalism and the methods and rules by which to reinforce such professionalism. Professionalism requires rigorous organisation of elections by well-trained and experienced EMBs’ members and staff. During the afternoon, researchers from the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom) will present the conclusions of the survey conducted since the presentation of the Project “Improving electoral management: the organisational determinants of electoral integrity” to participants of the 13th EMB Conference last year.

The second plenary session will also be followed by three working sessions:

How to ensure professionalism and accountability of EMBs?

This panel is to discuss expected skills for EMBs’ members and staff. It seems crucial to guarantee personal commitment of EMBs’ staff, especially at subordinate levels. Professionalism also requires strategic and operational planning for EMBs to work effectively during the whole electoral cycle. This includes publication of decisions adopted by election commissions and of disaggregated election results as well. It will also be relevant to debate observer access to electoral processes as a whole, the accountability of EMBs, considering that they are independent administrative bodies in many countries, and how to ensure such independence and accountability at the same time. Learning from past electoral processes, this working session will also debate the importance of thorough feedback both within election administrations and externally vis-à-vis other electoral stakeholders, in particular political parties and civil society.

Training of electoral stakeholders by Electoral Management Bodies

There is more and more need for training of EMBs staff as more complex electoral laws are drafted and more expectations from electoral stakeholders arise. However, the need for training on electoral processes or on some phases of electoral processes is a necessity for other categories of electoral stakeholders as well, in particular – where applicable – electoral judges, proxies, election observers, etc. What is the role of EMBs in the training of such categories of electoral stakeholders?

How to reinforce the capacity building of Electoral Management Bodies?

We have seen Central Election Commissions with developed training centres while other EMBs have no such training structures. With the different structures of EMBs in mind, this panel will exchange good practices regarding modernised training units or centres which are either internalised or externalised. One possible topic for discussion is the potential of improving in-house capacities as opposed to the potential to outsource training capacities. Discussions could also be held on the use of shared platforms and other modern means aimed at reinforcing the internal and external capacities of EMBs.

On **Tuesday, 16 May 2017**, speakers will be invited to intervene during **the third and last plenary session** on the topic: “Towards genuine democratic elections”. This session will be broader than the two previous ones and will deal with various but convergent discussions on ways to improve electoral processes thanks to EMBs and other electoral stakeholders. Three working sessions will follow this last plenary session:

Parliamentary dimension of elections: how to improve electoral legislation and practice in line with international standards? The experience of the latest elections in Europe

Based on elections recently held in different countries, the panel participating in this working session will debate what went well or what could have been done better in such past electoral cycles, offering a lessons-learned exercise. In this framework, the participants will discuss how in practice electoral stakeholders implement international standards as contained within various international documents, such as: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25), the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 3, Protocol 1), the Convention on Standards for Democratic Elections and Electoral Rights in CIS member states, the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters and the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

How can Electoral Management Bodies enhance voting rights?

This panel will debate methods that EMBs have so far been carried out in order to enhance voting rights. The panel will discuss methods allowing voters temporarily away from their permanent residence to register before E-Day – i.e. the particular requirements for prior registration in another polling station – and vote in a place of temporary residence. The participants will also discuss on the methods and safeguards developed by EMBs in order to avoid multiple voting and to achieve reliable voter registers.

How to enhance better understanding of electoral processes by voters?

This session will debate the possibilities voters have to access information on an electoral process. Access to dispute-resolution mechanisms as well as with possible new measures for more transparent elections are other aspects to be discussed. It could also be useful to debate disabled voters' access to information as well as equal access to voting.

A fourth and final plenary session will be devoted to the **discussion and the adoption of the conclusions of the 14th EMB Conference**.