

Dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to take this opportunity and share with this respective audience the experience of Georgian election administration in designing a new approach towards one of a very challenging issue such as Electoral Security.

Holding elections in a secure and peaceful environment is one of the core principles for conducting credible elections. Ensuring electoral security is a priority for each Election Management Body and it may require diverse approach and activates in response to the different forms of electoral violence.

Peaceful and secure election environment has become a priority for our EMB after a few small-scale conflict breakouts that took places during the previous elections and it came up on the agenda to develop an approach that needed to be institutionalized. We saw that there was more need for security as well as the need for the precisely separated functions between the police and election officials, which required to be more coordinated and organized in case of such need.

In order to ensure the high level administration and management of elections processes in Georgia, in May of 2016, the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia approved the Election Integrity Management Plan (EIMP) that aimed to define and address the risks related to holding transparent and credible elections, as well as institutionalize the CEC commitment to electoral integrity. The EIMP of the CEC defines **Electoral Security** as one of the priority areas with the prescribed strategies and actions for mitigating the risks related to security. Creating and implementing more practical training modules on security issues was defined as one of the activities for mitigating the related risks.

Managing the risks of emerging conflict at the polling stations during the E-day, as well as during the whole electoral cycle, was the main issue the CEC of Georgia aimed to address. The CEC has developed and established very own and effective approach to the challenges that electoral security and management of electoral conflict used to face in Georgia.

For the first time, prior to the 2016 Parliamentary Elections, by the initiative of the CEC of Georgia and in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (MIA), a concept of the new initiative was developed that aimed at ensuring secure and peaceful election environment during the October parliamentary elections. Within the pre-election period, several working meetings were conducted between the representatives of the CEC and the MIA. The discussions during these workshops, resulted in drafting the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which draw main lines of cooperation between the Election Administration (EA) and the MIA for ensuring electoral security. By signing the MoU parties agreed to be guided by the universal principles of human rights and join their efforts to ensure realization of voters' universal and equal suffrage through holding free, fair, transparent and genuine elections. Supporting the conduct of 2016 Parliamentary Elections in peaceful and

secure environment, as well as defining new forms of collaboration between the CEC and MIA, and ensuring relevant legislative background was defined as the main objectives of the MoU.

Based on the signed MoU, the CEC, its Training Center and the representatives of the MIA organized several workshops for discussing the existing challenges related with the election security. The collaborative process was supported by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). It is worth noting, that the IFES-invited leading expert in electoral security Mr. Vasu Mohan, who is the Regional Director for the Asia Pacific (IFES) led the seminars and trainings. At the workshops, Mr. Mohan shared the international experience in electoral conflict management and electoral security.

As a result of the conducted seminars CEC Training Center elaborated new training module “Electoral Security”. The training module, which was in line with election legislation and regulations of law enforcement agencies, envisaged guidelines for managing electoral conflicts, defined effective tools of communication between the EA and the law enforcement agencies, measures to ensure relevant response to the emerging electoral conflict and prevent it throughout the electoral cycle.

At the later stage of implementing the election security initiative, the trainings were conducted for the relevant staff members of EA and the Law Enforcement Agencies. The CEC Training Center integrated the new module “Electoral Security” within the trainings of the Precinct Election Commission (PEC) members. During the pre-election period, the members of all 3,634 Precinct Election Commissions (approximately 48 000 PEC members) received the guidelines and instructions for ensuring security at the polling stations and managing conflict during the voting process. The guidelines included instruction for the PEC members about when and in which circumstances they were responsible to summon the police forces; what are the tools in hands of the PEC members to mitigate the risks of conflict and manage the emerged conflict; how to secure the election documentation, inventory and related materials.

The Minister of the Internal Affairs of Georgia issued the special order in line with the elaborated guidelines. The order served as an instruction to the Law Enforcement Agencies for ensuring secure election environment and guided them in dealing with electoral conflict. The Ministry of Internal Affairs also ensured the conduct of series of trainings for police forces about the elaborated guidelines which covered the issues related with the distance, police should keep from the polling stations as the election legislation prohibits their presence at the election precincts during the E-day. Before the series of trainings conducted for both involved parties -election officials and police, the ToT was also organized and these two entities have exchanged their trainers during the learning process.

This systematic and professional approach to the electoral security as well as strictly defined and separated functions assigned to the representatives of the EA and MIA ensured the smooth performance of their duties on E-day without overlapping their competencies. This process overall resulted in effective services delivered to voters during the 2016 Parliamentary and 2017 Municipal Elections.

The positive outcomes of the first attempt to ensure institutionalized approach towards the electoral conflict management proved to be a very fruitful and successful example of collaboration between the state and public agencies. The overall process supported by the international organization - IFES appeared to deliver very progressive results. The leading local and international observer organizations unequivocally reported that the elections were mainly conducted in peaceful and calm election environment and voters enjoyed the possibility to freely exercise their suffrage right and without hindrance participate in elections. It is worth noting that out of 3,645 polling stations incidents that did not affect election results took place only at three election precincts throughout the whole Georgia.

The most recent national polls conducted by National Democratic Institute in December 2017 revealed that 93% of citizens agreed the polling process was well organized during the October Municipal Elections, 93% believed it was secure and 90 % stated that election officials were well prepared.

Derived from this positive experience, prior to the 2017 Municipal Elections, the CEC and MIA revived the platform of their cooperation on election conflict management. It is worth noting that the project has a sustainable effect, however the Election Administration and MIA plan to implement the series of trainings prior to the upcoming Presidential Election to be held in October 2018 and carry on the related activities for each elections till the issue of secure election environment pulls out from the agenda.