

Dear President, Minister, ladies and gentlemen

Let me cordially welcome you in Bratislava at the 16th European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies.

It is my pleasure and I was pleased to take the opportunity to be present at the opening of the meeting of representatives of members of the Council of Europe that are in charge of transparent, independent and democratic course of elections.

For an observer from outside, elections are a battlefield for political parties and candidates fighting for support of fellow citizens and, increasingly, a media show. Behind the political scene, there are many organizers working there and elections could not be possible without their effort. Elections officers, members of election committees at all levels, employees of units performing electronic counting of votes – no elections could be possible without them. It is adherence to rules of correct election battle that matters more to them than the election result itself. I am pleased that the regular conference of election officers, i.e. those who actually make sure that elections are held, is taking place in Bratislava. I know that democracy is not only about elections but there would be no democracy without elections.

Rules of election law application, even despite different cultural and political development, historical circumstances which have led to the differences, are similar in all countries from the viewpoint of the secrecy, free will in voting, equality of votes. Thus, when preparing and carrying out elections, we face very similar challenges and, therefore, we have the reason to share experience and learn from each other.

Elections are also the means of performance of the political power – they are used to select persons who will perform the most important positions in the country. Rule of law assumes judicial supervision over performance of the state power and, thus, election judiciary, which

supervises adherence to the legal regulation of the election process, forms an intrinsic part of it. It ensures remedy of possible errors and disproves unjustified suspicions of its inaccuracy. It contributes to credibility of elections, legitimism of elected officials and, last but not least, supporting democratic institutions in the society. The topic is suitable for a professional meeting of election organisers from various countries and the Council of Europe, in particular, the Venice Commission, i.e. European Commission for Democracy Through Law, is a good platform for considerations about the judicial supervision of the core of the democratic process.

Since 1989, Slovakia has undergone significant, essential changes which transformed not only the democratic nature of the society but also made it possible for Slovaks to live in their own sovereign state. It is just logical that such changes also influenced the terms of application of the election law that have undergone several legislative changes until, finally, our parliament adopted new, so called Election Act in 2014 regulating rules for execution of the election law for all types of elections.

A substantial change occurred as a result of establishing the professional and independent state committee for elections and supervision over financing of political parties that oversees legality of the course of elections and also reviews financing of political parties.

Another change is that, in the counting of voters' votes, the work of election committees has been made easier thanks to the use of information system and the fact that minutes of the election results are provided to the summarising unit in electronic format. Authenticity of the ballot and its marking by voters remain unchanged and, let me say, that although we are not trying to avoid the progress in electronization of the society, this method of casting votes and counting votes is a guarantee of a simple and convincing review of constitutional and legal nature of elections. Transparency of elections, indubitable nature of the election result and the possibility to review every single ballot in the case of dispute, combined with electronic minutes, are, in my opinion, very good way how to convince voters that their votes have

been counted correctly. However, in the case of errors, it creates preconditions for making the remedy.

I am convinced that every country represented here is looking for and creating the best possible conditions for application of the election law and, therefore, I expect interesting conclusions that will help us in taking further steps toward improvement of the election process and increase of the trust in election results.

At the end, let me express my gratitude to the Venice Commission for the trust it expressed when it decided to hold the conference in Bratislava and for organising the event and, of course, to all of you for coming here and joining an interesting discussion and thus contributing to joint conclusions for the purposes of improving rules for preparation and execution of elections.

Let me wish you a successful course of discussion and a pleasant stay in Bratislava.