



The
Electoral
Commission



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EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

in co-operation with
THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

**7TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE
OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES**

“EVERY VOTER COUNTS”

**Dexter House, No. 2 Royal Mint Court,
Tower Hill, London, EC3N 4QN
22 - 23 June 2010**

SYNOPSIS

The seventh European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies – “Every Voter Counts” – was organised by the Venice Commission in co-operation with the United Kingdom Electoral Commission on 22-23 June 2010. The issues which were addressed during the conference included the recent elections in Member States, as well as a range of issues concerning ways of ensuring that electors’ interests are given the importance they deserve in the planning and management of elections and electoral systems.

Around 50 participants from national electoral management bodies of the following countries attended the conference: Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Finland, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and United Kingdom, as well as members of the Venice Commission and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and representatives of the Council of Europe’s Directorates-General of Democracy and Political Affairs, and Human Rights and Legal Affairs.

Also represented were the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; the United Nations; and the Organisation of American States.

The conference was opened by Ms Jenny Watson, Chair of the UK Electoral Commission, Professor Jeffrey Jowell, Member of the Venice Commission and Mr Thomas Markert, Secretary of the Venice Commission.

Reports on member states’ recent elections were presented by Ms Tatevik Ohanyan, Spokesperson, Central Electoral Commission of Armenia; Mr Gregor Wenda, Deputy Head of the Electoral Administration Department, Federal Ministry of the Interior of Austria; Mr Stéphan de Mul, Head of the Elections Unit, General Directorate of Institutions & Populations, Federal Public Service of Belgium; Ms Susan Kleebank, Adviser for International Affairs, Superior Electoral Court of Brazil; Mr Melle Bakker, Secretary-Director, Netherlands Electoral Council (Kiesraad); Mr Vladimir Churov, President, Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation; Ms Eva Chmelova, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic; Mr Andrii Maghera, Vice-President, Central Electoral Commission of Ukraine; and Mr Peter Wardle, Chief Executive, United Kingdom Electoral Commission.

The conference heard key addresses from Mr Keith Whitmore, Member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Member of the Council for Democratic Elections; Mr Konrad Olszewski, Former Deputy Head of Elections Department, OSCE/ODIHR; Mr Dovydas Vitkauskas, Consultant on European Human Rights Law; Mr Andrew Scallan, Director of Electoral Administration, UK Electoral Commission.

The conference discussed how to ensure that “every voter counts” in relation to three main areas: electoral modernisation; the accessibility and inclusiveness of the electoral process; and the professionalism of electoral management bodies.

The conference:

- 1 *Took note* of the information from participants about elections organised in their countries during 2009-10.
- 2 *Underlined* the continuing importance of work on international standards for the use of election technology such as the development of guidelines on the certification of e-voting systems and guidelines on transparency in e-enabled elections by the Council of Europe, and discussion papers by OSCE/ODIHR and other international observation missions on observation of e-enabled elections.

- 3 *Noted* the continuing imperative of ensuring that electors have access to free and fair elections at all times.
- 4 *Noted* that citizens expect their voice to be listened to when designing and delivering public services in the 21st century, and that the extent to which this expectation is met will have a strong influence on electors' confidence in the electoral process.
- 5 *Concluded* that not only electoral management bodies, but also policy-makers should:
 - a. make determined efforts to understand fully the needs and wishes of electors when considering how best to ensure that all aspects of the electoral process – including, for example, not only the procedures for registering to vote and the opportunities and methods for casting a vote, but also the procedures for publishing and explaining the results of elections and for making complaints about the electoral process – are fully accessible and transparent to all.
 - b. be aware that basic, good, clear and transparent legislation, including enforcement thereof, contributes to integrity and public confidence in the electoral process.
 - c. actively seek the views of electors – and all other participants in the electoral process¹ – to evaluate all aspects of the electoral process.
 - d. be prepared to change the electoral process where appropriate in order to respond adequately to the needs and wishes of electors; an important aspect of this involves analysing electors' questions and complaints about the electoral process in order to identify and respond to widespread problems.
 - e. while recognising that electoral management bodies and policy-makers alone cannot be expected to increase general turnout at elections, they should nevertheless constantly seek to identify obstacles to electors' full participation in all aspects of the electoral process, including legal and practical barriers, and consider how to remove them where possible; noting that there is a wide range of potential barriers, for example for people with disabilities, those from minority groups, people living or serving abroad.
 - f. reinforce the importance of providing electors – and all other participants in the electoral process – with clear explanations of their rights and obligations; and the conference noted that this role should be performed on a strictly impartial basis at all times, and also at all levels of electoral management, i.e. national, regional and local.
 - g. make efforts to understand the best way of communicating with electors - and other participants in the electoral process – including how best to educate them about the electoral process; and to provide them with information about how to participate, which should include work to ensure that electoral registration materials and ballot papers benefit from the best possible design and use clear language.

¹ Including political parties and other participants in civil society.

- h. avoid the assumption that electors are all the same, but instead remember that electors are a diverse group with a range of needs and wishes that should be understood and addressed when considering improvements to the electoral process.
 - i. remember that the most effective way of responding to electors' different needs and wishes may often be at regional or local level, rather than always at a central or national level; and that all other participants in the electoral process have an important contribution to make in ensuring that "every voter counts".
 - j. ensure that all those responsible for managing elections - at every level of the electoral process - have the appropriate level of skills, knowledge, training, experience and impartiality to provide electors with a professional service that meets electors' needs and wishes and builds confidence in the democratic process; and in particular, that those responsible for the management of elections are adequately trained in any changes to the electoral process in order to ensure that electors benefit fully from improvements.
 - k. bear in mind that electoral management bodies should command the confidence and trust of electors.
- 6 *Noted* that in order to fulfil these responsibilities, electoral management bodies require adequate resources; and reminded member states of the importance of ensuring that these resources are available.
- 7 *Invited* electoral management bodies to provide the Secretariat of the Venice Commission with their current electoral legislation if possible in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe.
- 8 *Requested* the Secretariat of the Venice Commission to continue to provide the secretariat of the European Conferences of Election Management Bodies.
- 9 *Requested* the Secretariat of the Venice Commission to conduct a comprehensive comparative study of electoral management bodies.

The eighth European Conference of Election Management Bodies will take place in Vienna in the first half of 2011.