



7th Annual Meeting of Election Management Bodies
Innovative Services and Effective Electoral Procedures
27-28 February, 2017
Borjomi, Georgia

The Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC) in cooperation with International Centre for Parliamentary Studies (ICPS) hosted the 7th Annual Meeting of Election Management Bodies in Borjomi, Georgia. The event was co-organized by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), with financial support from USAID.

The event focused on the forward-looking theme of “Innovative Services and Effective Electoral Procedures” and brought together representatives from 20 Election Management Bodies (EMBs), as well as 12 international organizations. It provided an opportunity for election practitioners from around the world to discuss best practices, share their experience and address the challenges that the introduction of innovative services may represent to the integrity of the electoral process. The conference also featured the participation of several vendor companies offering their cutting-edge technologies aimed at enhancing electoral procedures.

During the conference’s opening remarks, Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia, highlighted the importance of experience-sharing among participants and stressed the critical role of democratic elections in nation-building. Matt Gokhool, Chief Executive of ICPS underlined the importance of analyzing the experience of EMBs from around the world in designing and delivering increasingly innovative services to voters. IFES Vice President of Programs, Michael Svetlik pointed out IFES’ thirty years of experience strengthening the effectiveness of election management bodies, and contributions to the field in the form of applied research, which tends to underpin innovation, and noted the substantial efforts of the Georgian CEC in “striving to be at the forefront of international practice by developing innovations that drive election administration forward in support of inclusive, transparent elections.” Tamar Zhvania, Chairperson of the CEC, highlighted that credibility of elections depends on the services that Election Management Bodies deliver to electoral stakeholders and voters; and the quality of the

suggested services relies on the positive innovations that we introduce and implement successfully. All concurred with Ms Zhvania's opinion, according to which Georgia was "... in search of the paths which allows us to introduce more effective services to voters and adopt innovative technologies."

The sessions offered participants a wide overview of international standards and good practice, as well as lessons learned in implementing various technologies in the field of elections from the perspective of international organizations such as: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), Council of Europe (CoE), Venice Commission of the CoE, IFES, ICPS, Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO) and the Delian Project. Among other important details underlined during the presentations representatives of international organizations highlighted the importance of feasibility studies before introducing election technologies and the importance of considering its sustainability.

The representatives from EMBs of nine countries shared their unique experiences with innovative practices, which ranged from e-services and other high-tech solutions, to non-technology related innovations that focused on improvements to long-established procedures and practices. The event participants had an opportunity to learn about internal management system of Maldives, Latvia, Mexico, Kyrgyz Republic, Ukraine, India, and Jordan. They discussed practices of voter registration process and transparency of the voters' list from Moldavian and Georgian experiences.

Ms Zhvania shared with meeting participants some of the improvements in election administration services, which include innovative devices such as smartphones and quick payment terminals for voters' data verification in the voters' lists. The services were introduced in advance of Georgia's 2016 Parliamentary Elections.

Participants also engaged in a robust discussion of the potential impact of cyber influence on elections by external actors. They concurred saying that the introduction of innovative services into the electoral process was generating both interest and concerns among voters. While the introduction of innovative systems and processes could open up new horizons and offer suitable technical alternatives to EMBs, they recognized that inappropriate or untimely innovations could also compromise the transparency, accountability, sustainability and local ownership of the electoral process as well as voters' confidence.

The conference concluded with a recognition that confidence building was the cornerstone of the introduction innovative services and effective electoral procedures. As one participant underlined: "Technology cannot build trust towards the electoral processes – it is trust that you need to implement the technology."