

Lithuanian Experience in Citizens' Engagement with Technology and Innovation

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It is an honor and a privilege to be invited to participate in this Conference. Today I'll speak about Lithuanian Experience in Citizens' Engagement with Technology and Innovation.

Over the last few years, the use of various technologies, such as computers, smartphones, online banking, navigation and other advanced technologies that are nowadays remarkably widespread, has increased significantly. Technologies undergoing the process of development have changed the sphere of elections, in which a kind of revolution has taken place.

Today, one could hardly find a stage in the electoral process that would not employ new technologies, starting with voter registration and ending with the calculation of election results. Nonetheless, the pressure on the use of even more of modern technologies in elections is increasing every day. Therefore, the organisers of elections are seeking to find new solutions to increase voter turnout, facilitate the involvement of citizens living abroad, reduce the cost of electoral administration as well as the operating costs and the need for workforce, and to facilitate the organisation of small elections, reduce the number of human errors, improve the accuracy of counting votes, increase the speed of counting and publishing the ballot, stimulate the need to amend existing legislation, obsolete provisions, also the solutions requiring education and training of voters and election commissions, enabling observers to completely monitor the electoral process, enabling voters with disabilities and minority representatives to participate in the elections.

But first of all, before you decide whether to use electoral technologies in the electoral process, and what kind of them you should choose, you need to answer a few questions. What is the problem and how technology can help solve it? Is there a legal basis for that? What is the need for such technologies and benefits in the long run, and whether voters, politicians, and campaigners will rely on such technologies?

The use of technology should be purposeful. It must help function democracy,

strengthen it, help solve problems rather than create new ones. It must be suitable, i.e. be compatible with the country's infrastructure, technological capabilities and ensure a high level of security. The cultural, political and legal aspects must be taken into account. It is important that the benefits and efficiency of technology are effectively exploited to ensure the protection of the basic electoral principles. Even in cases where it is clear that technology can help solve many problems, the processes of taking decisions on employing technology must involve as many parties as possible. Each case of technology deployment has to be discussed. The risks of using each technology in elections must be assessed. We need to evaluate the way the technologies will work in the real world as well as the benefits for voters.

Today, electoral administrators use a large variety of technologies throughout the electoral process as well as for individual functions of the electoral body. Technology is increasingly used as a means of helping people cast their ballots. Like, for example, voter identification, determining whether the voters have the right to vote, the process of casting a ballot, calculation of votes, announcement of election results.

Lithuania is no exception. CEC has involved a number of technologies. For example, technology is a very effective and useful tool for redrawing the boundaries of constituencies. Modern technologies enable CEC to redraw the boundaries of electoral districts, on the basis of the data received from the Population Register as well as the data on the voters' declared place of residence, and taking into account the allowable deviations.

Electoral technologies allow identify if a person is a party member or not. Although the parties and their members are registered by the Ministry of Justice, the tool available for CEC helps easily verify and, if necessary, use in your activities.

CEC uses technology to facilitate the parties, other election campaign participants, information disseminators and producers the process of providing financial and political campaign reports and registering victims. It means that members of the parties and other campaign participants submit electoral reports online through the CEC information system. In view of the fact that community needs to be informed about the finances of the parties and campaign participants and their reports, CEC will modify the reports submitted by the campaign participants electronically and publish them on the CEC

website. When data is digitized, it is easier to process, make various reports and publish relevant information.

CEC uses technology and partly accepts candidates' documents in electronic form. Having information on the candidates in the CEC information system, we can use them in a broader context, for example, by printing ballot papers, publishing election results etc.

We use technology also for the verification of signatures on ballots when voting for candidates for the member of the Seimas or the President. CEC scans ballots and compares the information with the data of the Population Register. When it comes to verifying a high number of signatures in a relatively short time, this authentication technology is extremely useful.

Technology is also used to identify voters. Lithuanian legislation in force requires the identification of the person who has arrived to vote, i.e. everyone who has come to vote must provide a personal identity document. During the pre-voting on the previous elections, we used scanners to scan the document code in order to verify the voter's identity and include him or her in the voters' list.

Compiling voter lists is one of the most important and time-consuming activities of CEC. With the help of up-to-date technologies, CEC obtains data on voters from the Population Register on the basis of which electronic voter lists are compiled. On the elections day, voters can cast a ballot in any electoral district, and electronic voter lists ensure that voters vote only once.

Technology may become an effective means of communicating with electors. The CEC has the call centre "1855" during election period, too. The voters are permitted to receive information about enrolling into the voters' list, all basic information about voting procedure, time table, polling stations (e.g. address, telephone number of chairperson, etc.). It is possible to register complaints, too.

The CEC has also a mobile telephone app which provides the possibility to observe the electoral processes, especially electoral results. In the future, CEC is planning to use SMS sending to voters. It is planned that voters should receive messages with the main information on the elections, i.e. date and place of voting, necessary document to hold with you etc.

Technology can also be used to exchange certain piece of information with voters

and campaign participants. In the upcoming elections, CEC is considering enabling voters to capture possible violations of law on the map, which will contain short information about the violation and supporting evidence. We also consider the possibility for voters to provide a tool for marking the cases of political advertising that have been spotted on the CEC map. The voter then should mark the building or place on the map where he or she noticed political advertising, and upload a proper photo. The information would later be used to check the reports submitted by the parties and advertisers.

Some years ago, the CEC has created the electronic services portal named “Voter’s Page“ www.rinkejopuslapis.lt for all the voters. The voter is permitted to find out all personalized information about elections (e.g. his/her polling station address and the map to reach it; politicians representing him/her; the history of voters’ participation in elections; the main information about the upcoming elections, etc.). The portal provides the possibilities to ask specific data or present requests for the CEC, too. Moreover, it permits to write electronic messages to candidates. On the website, voters are free to check available information on the previous elections, find information about upcoming elections, their electoral districts and constituencies. What is more the voter can check the fact of his participation in the elections: the date and district in which he or she voted. Voters have the right to submit a motivated electronic application on the website to be included on the voter lists of another electoral district. Candidates can use the website also for electioneering, as a candidate can present extra information on his background, the schedule and location of the meeting with voters, and other voter-related information on his page, in addition to the documents submitted to CEC. Candidates participating in the elections to Seimas have their own personal mailboxes to which they can receive electoral letters or write themselves to all constituency voters. We believe that this website is a great opportunity to send a great deal of information about the elections.

CEC collaborates with various state and municipal institutions, non-governmental organisations that share information by means of technology on the elections and electoral districts adapted to people with disabilities.

Technologies are used to help voters with hearing impairment, visual impairment or special needs. Before each election, CEC creates a variety of videos distributed on TV, radio, social media, which broadcast the information on elections, voting processes,

information on how to vote, how to fill in the ballot paper, and so on. All videos created by CEC are translated into the sign language.

Technology is also used in the calculation of votes. The election ballots are initially counted by hand, the final results, including rankings, are recorded, summed up, transferred to CEC and announced by means of technology. The software must certainly operate on a high level of precision. They must be tested, and guaranteed that they are not fraudulent or deviating from the actual number of votes for the particular candidate.

Technologies are also instrumental in the involvement of citizens living abroad in electoral processes. It means that voters are given the opportunity to fill in an electronic form no later than 5 months before the elections and sign up to vote in the diplomatic office by post or on arrival in person.

Some Lithuanians believe that electronic voting could contribute to the involvement of voters in elections. However, discussions on this issue that have been going on for more than a decade have not yielded any tangible results at the moment. In fact, at the end of the last year, the Ministry of Justice prepared a draft law on the validation of online voting in the upcoming elections in Lithuania, which is scheduled for consideration at the Parliament's spring session. Nevertheless, it is likely that next year, in the three general elections – municipal councils, the President and the European Parliament, voting will take place in the usual way.

Thus, as we can see, the influence of technology on electoral processes is inevitably increasing, some of them dramatically changing. And although the basic principles of voter registration, voting and calculation of votes have remained the same, today, a lot depends on the technology that is improving at the speed of light while bringing changes into the electoral processes.