



**Summary Report – 6th Annual Meeting of Election Management Bodies
16-17 February 2016
Lopota Lake, Kakheti, Georgia**

“Electoral Integrity”

The Conference Objective

The Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC), the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies (ICPS), and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) hosted the sixth Annual Meeting of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) at Lopota Lake in Kakheti, Georgia. The two-day event focused on the critical theme of Electoral Integrity and brought together Chairpersons, members and staff of 19 EMBs, and 16 intergovernmental and international organizations from across the globe. The meeting also allowed representatives of vendor companies to present tools and cutting-edge technologies that provide possibilities for enhancing electoral procedures.

There are many examples throughout modern history of how the lack of transparency or inadequate leadership has been detrimental to the electoral process. An EMB’s mandate in a given country context varies widely as does the democratic culture and participation of other actors. This political and cultural variability can make identifying standard approaches to electoral integrity difficult. With this in mind, the objective of the Lopota Lake event was to provide an opportunity for election management professionals and experts of various backgrounds and electoral contexts to discuss and learn from their own leadership experiences and best practices in order to improve and support the integrity of electoral processes in their respective countries.

Main Themes

Electoral integrity is a fundamental element of democratic elections and electoral processes more broadly. While definitions of electoral integrity varied throughout the conference, panelists often suggested common core elements associated with the concept include equality among citizens, inclusivity of people both as voters and candidates, a legal framework that supports equal suffrage both its design and application, and the periodic practice of holding credible elections within this framework. Panelists representing intergovernmental and international organizations also helped to frame the discussion by highlighting crosscutting issues such as inclusion, migration, security, organizational leadership and technology. EMB leaders and elections experts from countries including Albania, Georgia, Hungary, India, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, and Namibia shared country-specific examples of ways EMBs and other actors are working ensure integrity within the electoral process. These examples included internal capacity building, strategic and operational planning, regular consultation with stakeholder groups, voter outreach, and use of technological tools at multiple points along the electoral cycle.

Elements frequently cited by conference panelists and participants as important to electoral integrity included:

- An independent EMB in both law and practice;
- Effective electoral leadership on the part of EMB heads in their dealings with the public and in internal planning and operations;
- Appropriately trained poll workers;
- EMB-led outreach and voter education;
- Appropriate and effective use of technologies in both the administration of elections and capacity building of administrators;
- Population and information security;
- Active efforts toward inclusion of marginalized groups;
- Enforcement of statutes with meaningful penalties;
- An open, competitive multiparty political environment with a level financial playing field;
- Ability to register and equality of the vote among citizens;
- Citizen observation of electoral processes;
- Unbiased media coverage of the electoral cycle;
- Methods for bringing forward and addressing complaints; and
- Mechanisms to identify and address vulnerabilities of electoral processes.

Directly linked to the absence or presence of the listed elements above are the public's trust of state institutions and fellow citizens, and perceptions of legitimacy. These were also identified as primary factors in achieving electoral integrity. Likewise, it was presented that the integrity of elections is tied to not only perceived legitimacy but is often also linked to security and inversely related to state repression within a country.

In the country contexts discussed, almost all panelists agreed that while the actions of EMBs are an essential ingredient to ensuring electoral integrity, these bodies cannot work in isolation and share this responsibility with other government and non-government actors. This duty extends to political parties, citizen observers, media, and others to play their part. In particular, citizen voices must be sought out to fully understand if electoral processes are believed to have integrity in a given context. It is not enough to capture observer and media reports on the qualities of a process; citizen engagement at a grassroots level is critical. In addition to seeking out citizens' perspectives, using tools that incorporate input from many sources such as an Electoral Integrity Assessment, which maps risks while differentiating between fraud, malpractice and systemic manipulation, assists EMBs in understanding threats to electoral processes and allowing for effective prioritization.

Final Reflections

At its core, electoral integrity means the fundamental protection of the right of voters to participate and to choose their leaders. The following points, though not exhaustive, are reflective of the overarching discussion and lessons shared during the two-day meeting:

- It is the responsibility of all elections professionals, technical experts, civil society, and other stakeholders to ensure that voters are continually educated about the electoral process as part of the effort to protect election integrity.
- Additional focus and resources should be devoted to supporting the participation of internally displaced persons in elections. While there is a general recognition of the difficulty associated with the registration of and voting by these persons, their exclusion caused by institutional or legal barriers challenges the integrity of the electoral process.

- As part of the effort to be inclusive of diaspora communities, additional resources and attention should be paid to out-of-country voting by both individual countries and observer organizations.
- Strong electoral leadership projects competence and builds trust. Part of achieving this is the development of skills for external environments (such as in stakeholder relations) and internally (such as in strategic planning, and policy development and enforcement). Peer-to-peer information exchange at the leadership level is extremely valuable.
- Integrity assessments, a systematic tool to anticipate and assess risk, can provide valuable information for EMBs to take a proactive approach to addressing country-specific vulnerabilities and their potential impacts on electoral processes.
- Development, operationalization, and consistent application of enforcement mechanisms are crucial to trust in the fairness of the system.