

REPUBLIC OF CROATIA STATE ELECTION COMMISSION

In April 2006 Republic of Croatia has adopted Law on State Election Commission of the Republic of Croatia in which State Election Commission has been determined as permanent and independent body. In February 2007 Croatian Parliament has appointed two vice presidents and four members of permanent State Election Commission, as well as the President and two vice presidents among the ranks of the judges of Republic of Croatia Supreme Court. The said Commission started its work on March 9th 2007.

Immediately following the appointment, State Election Commission has started preparations for conduction of elections of Councils and representatives of national minorities in local and regional government units which took place on June 17th 2007. Apart from usual preparations related to election conduction, Commission has held an educational seminar for members of counties' and larger cities election commissions in the Republic of Croatia.

As stipulated in the new Law, among other duties, State Election Commission has to fulfil a demanding and important task, namely, the education of election commissions on lower levels about the election conduction. Even do the education for minority elections has been prepared and held in a way no different then prior the adoption of the Law; Commission is now, as a permanent body, able to add supplementary topics to the education, and not as earlier only focus on those directly linked to the elections. State Election Commission is facing a challenge to prepare and create a module of education conduction as well as to determine all issues that electoral bodies on lower levels have in their work. At this stage, it is hard to go into more details about the elements of future education, as the project conducted jointly with the UNDP Croatia is still ongoing. Difficulties in project implementation come from the fact that election commissions on lower levels still are not professionalized and they are appointed ad hoc - prior to elections. State Election Commission is, according to the Law, able to initiate electoral legislation changes and suggest solutions for the electoral legislation enhancement. According to that, one of the first initiatives would be making the suggestion for professionalized election commissions on lower levels. Having those commissions as permanent bodies, would make it possible to conduct a targeted and continuous education. Until now that was not possible.

State Election Commission is going to conduct and organize education for the coming parliamentary elections, and in spite of the fact that election commissions on lower levels are not professionalized bodies, will try to make the education more comprehensive and inclusive for higher number of persons involved in the elections conduction, especially members of voting committees. Connected to that, we will prepare a new manual. UNDP Croatia, through the *Project of support to capacity building of the State Election Commission*, is providing us with extensive professional and organizational support.

We have to emphasise that conduction of various activities is demanding for the Commission, as due to the tasks that were in front of the Commission following its appointment, the Commission was not able to form the Secretariat for administrative support. In addition to that, Commission does not have its own premises and is, for the time being, placed in the Croatian Parliament premises that are not adequate.

Hopefully, after the parliamentary elections, we would manage to overcome those problems and be fully dedicated to the tasks stipulated by the Law, and especially, those focused on the systematic education of election commissions as we find them to be of crucial importance for successful and high quality election conduction.

Taking into account that Commission, for the first time, within its new structure, is participating on the Conference, we are interested in the experience of other member states, particularly in the part concerning the preparation and organization of education of election commissions' members as well as voters' education. Following that, we are especially keen to learn about experience and modules of election bodies' education of countries, which like Croatia, do not have professionalized election bodies on every level.