

## **Strengthening Electoral Administration: UNDP Electoral Support**

Aleida Ferreyra, Electoral Policy Specialist, United Nations Development Programme

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking the Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO) for organizing this conference and inviting the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to participate. I am delighted to be here among such an important group of electoral practitioners and friends. In my presentation I will **reflect on the importance of the independence of electoral management bodies (EMBs) and UNDP work to strengthen these bodies.**

The 2006's IDEA Handbook on Electoral Management Design distinguishes between **structural** independence, meaning a formal separation from the government; and **normative** or **fearless** independence, as in: not bending to external influence.

In terms of structure, we know that there are three models of EMBs—the independent, mixed, and governmental model. With two exceptions, all countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States follow the independent model (*see tables at the end of the document*). As mentioned before today by my colleague from the Electoral Assistance Division, the United Nations does not advocate for a specific model or structure of electoral administration and considers that this is a choice each country must make accordingly to their own situation. However, the need for an independent EMB has been identified in most emerging democracies and post-conflict elections. This is also a tendency that we are currently observing in the countries in transition in the Arab World –such as in Tunisia.

At a minimum, **genuine elections require a level playing field where voters have a real choice** and where the main obstacles to competition are removed by public authorities. **Fair legal provisions, good will, and neutrality** of law enforcement by election management bodies and other public authorities are necessary. On the administration of elections specifically, **EMBs should perform in a neutral manner, regardless of whether they are part of the Executive, or take the form of an independent electoral commission, or a mix of both.**

**One key question that arises, however, is how independence of electoral commissions from government and political parties is better assured.** Independence of electoral commissions is to be understood as a matter of **institutional freedom for decision**

**making** as much as of **non-partisan conduct by commissioners and their staff**. Some legal institutional resources exist in order to enhance the guarantees of independence no matter whether the electoral commission is staffed on a partisan basis, by professionals or a mix of both. These are basically the following:

- **Special legal treatment** of the independent electoral commission such as having it enshrined in the constitution and regulated by a special law in order to make it more difficult to introduce legal changes that would merely be supported by an incumbent government.
- **Consensus:** As is true for all electoral legislation, legislation relating to the institutional status and composition of EMBs is more widely accepted and effective, and better ensures independence when all relevant parties and factions participate in its drafting.
- **Regarding nomination and appointment procedures for commissioners and their chairman:** lists of candidates submitted by the legislature should require a special majority vote in order to encourage political parties to reach some consensus on nominees.
- **Funding of the commission and budgetary procedures.** The regular functioning budget of electoral commissions can be ensured as a percentage of the national consolidated budget. The budget for a specific election is normally prepared and submitted by the electoral commission to the legislature standing committee directly or through the Finance Ministry. Ad hoc electoral budgets prepared and decided upon by the Executive alone should be avoided as a threat to the independence of the electoral bodies.
- **Civil service protection** of the professional technical and administrative staff of the electoral commission must be ensured.

### ***United Nations Development Programme Electoral Support to EMBs***

The United Nations system is engaged in a wide range of development assistance activities that are intended to support the efforts of Member States to promote democratic electoral processes and build sustainable capacity to manage electoral systems and processes. UNDP offers strategic assistance throughout the electoral cycle, from support to designing more effective systems to help in resolving disputes after the votes are counted. The UNDP strategy is about an integrated, long-term electoral-cycle approach to electoral assistance. UNDP supports national efforts in key areas such as:

- legal reform;
- independent and permanent electoral management bodies;

- systems for planning, monitoring and budgeting to ensure credible elections and cost-effective electoral processes;
- voter and civic education for democratic rights and responsibilities;
- coordination of electoral assistance among donors and international and national partners; and
- women's participation in elections as voters and candidates.

### **UNDP Support Electoral administration**

Assistance in this sphere takes the form of strengthening institutions, offering professional development programmes to electoral administrators, building greater public information and outreach capacity, and helping countries with election-related resource management. It can also be more election-focused by taking the form of helping EMBs in planning, preparing and conducting elections and referenda. For example, in Moldova, UNDP is supporting the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova in the key areas of improved voter register; use of IT in election administration; enfranchisement of diaspora; capacity building of electoral staff; enhanced transparency of the electoral process through use of media, voter education; and direct support for procurement of specific election materials.

In Georgia, UNDP has been actively supporting the Electoral Administration of Georgia since 2003, including professional, technical and training assistance. In this regard, UNDP supported the EMB in training 50,000 permanent, temporary and support staff (especially in counting, tabulation, results transmission).

In other regions, for example, UNDP is supporting Tanzania's efforts to reinforce capacity and technical support to EMB on IT, logistics, procurement, communication. It also supported the national stakeholders in their efforts to strengthen election related security by promoting participatory assessment, supporting communication for effective response to incidents, etc.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It must be re-emphasized that there is no single model that fit all countries. All models have plus and minuses and therefore when designing or reforming a model these need to be considered.

The impartiality of a truly independent EMB tends to bring more legitimacy to the electoral process. An independent EMB is in control of its own funding and implementation of electoral activities; this allows greater electoral focus and professionalism. But the independent EMB is also independent from and may lack influence over the political and decision maker that determine the electoral framework. Higher costs may burden the electoral management due to the difficulty in co-opting existing governmental structures, and member turnover is not conducive to building institutional memory.

A number of **guiding principles** have been widely recognized as crucial to the work of electoral authorities: EMBs should:

- advocate participation by all political parties,
- promote transparency at all stages of the electoral process,
- be accountable to the legislature and to the public,
- promote the dissemination of voter information and civic education,
- and implement cost-effective measures.

These principles have been reiterated by different authors and organizations and are a useful framework for conducting elections and for the operations of EMBs.

Thank you

**Table: Different Models of Electoral Administration in the Europe and CIS Region**

Model	Europe and CIS Region	World
Independent	92%	59%
Mixed Model	4%	16%
Governmental	4%	21%
No elections	X	4%

Country	IDEA 2006	Country	IDEA 2006
Albania	I	Poland	I
Armenia	I	Republic of Moldova	I
Azerbaijan	I	Romania	I
Belarus	I	Russian Federation	I
Bosnia & Herzegovina	I	Serbia	I
Bulgaria	I	Slovakia	M
Croatia	I	Tajikistan	I
Cyprus	G	FYR Macedonia	I
Georgia	I	Turkey	I
Kazakhstan	I	Turkmenistan	I
Kyrgyzstan	I	Ukraine	I
Latvia	I	Uzbekistan	I
Lithuania	I	<i>Kosovo</i>	X
Montenegro	I		

Source: International IDEA 2006