

## ***The Importance of Strategic Planning and Leadership in Promoting Effective and Independent Election Management***

Good morning/afternoon, friends and colleagues. Let me begin by saying, on behalf of IFES, that we are indebted to the ACEEEO and the National Election Office of Hungary for their hard work in organizing this year's event. I am honored to be here today and grateful for the opportunity to speak on behalf of IFES on the occasion of the 20th Jubilee Anniversary. I hope that there will be many more years of fruitful collaborations between IFES and our East-Central European election management colleagues.

The main theme of this year's meeting, as you know, is "Independence of the Electoral Management Bodies." The technical questions that will be covered over the next few days are essential elements of independent and credible election management: from EMB finances and legal status of staff members, to the resolution of electoral irregularities and announcement of election results. My topic today will hopefully provide some additional color to these discussions. I would like to share a few thoughts with you about what I believe is the pivotal importance of excellent electoral leadership in the pursuit of independent election management, credible election results, and political stability.

IFES has spent the last two decades working to support our friends in election administration around the world. During that time, we have witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of countries conducting competitive elections. Millions of individuals in Europe and around the world regularly and freely exercise their voting right as the expression of their active role as citizens of democratic societies.

As you all know so well, few voters will thoroughly understand the magnitude and complexity of the monumental operations conducted by thousands of electoral officials, around the clock, starting months before the actual Election Day.

In contrast, from the perspective of an electoral administrator, the process of organizing and delivering an election is an extensive and complex endeavor that relies almost entirely on effective planning and management techniques.

In support of these processes, IFES practitioners around the world collaborate to turn field experiences, combined with robust academic research, into baseline electoral literature that is truly useful to election administrators around the world.

This year, IFES will also unfold a number of new initiatives that may be of special interest to many of you here today, including a book on the management of technology in elections and best practices for procurement of information technology; a guide on conducting a comprehensive feasibility study on electronic voting and counting machines; a final paper in

our series of white papers on assessing and combating election fraud; and an updated strategic planning guide and associated election leadership resources.

It is this last initiative that I would like to especially bring to your attention. From my own years thinking about electoral challenges, and based on the experiences that IFES has accumulated around the globe, it is clear that the conduct of free and fair elections – an important objective for everyone in this room – is highly dependent on the credibility and effectiveness of the team of election administrators tasked with their management.

A formalized strategic planning process is pivotal for effective election administration, but even this is not enough to ensure that an election management body performs at its best. I would suggest that the success of an election management body is highly dependent on excellent internal electoral leadership, both among commissioners and executive level managerial staff. This is a truism that you will find if you examine other institutions or industries, but it is particularly important in election administration, which deals with great risks and even challenges to political stability.

Some of the important leadership issues and challenges for the highest levels of election management include:

- How to build a publicly and politically credible institution;
- How to achieve understanding among electoral managers of all the resources available to strengthen the institution, including technical and financial assistance;
- A fundamental, high level understanding of electoral standards and best practices;
- How to manage and collaborate effectively within a commission as well as between a commission, its secretariat and its sub-national offices;
- How to manage relationships with other stakeholders, including politicians and candidates, government bodies, donors, and international technical assistance providers;
- How to collaborate with civil society to achieve quality elections and ensure a well-informed electorate; and,
- How to inspire and lead an electoral organization during and, particularly, between elections.

Effective leadership necessitates meeting these challenges head-on, both for the near term delivery of free, fair, and legitimate elections, and for the longer term goal of building a continuous, credible and inclusive electoral process. These are not easy tasks, but there is a great deal of experience embodied by practitioners around the world, including all of you gathered here in this room today.

Senior election managers across the globe have proven that the complexities of both developing and developed democracies need not stand in the way of effective leadership before, during, and after Election Day. There are a variety of different times during the election cycle when electoral leadership plays a uniquely important role. IFES proposes to

support election management bodies throughout this process, both in the newer democracies in East-Central Europe, as well as in countries with longer histories of democratic expression.

IFES experts, led by Antonio Spinelli and the late Joe Baxter, have produced two editions of a comprehensive strategic planning guide for election management bodies. As the logical next step in this process, we also plan to embark on creating a tailored curriculum on electoral leadership for senior electoral managers. This effort will be heavily influenced by IFES' many years of experience working with many of you in election management, and will provide a key opportunity for highlighting and capturing best practices in election administration and strategic planning.

I look forward to discussing this and other issues during our time together at the 20<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Anniversary Conference.

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