

Dr. Leonardo Valdes, President Councilor of IFE, Mexico
Budapest, Hungary, June 16, 2011.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,
Mrs. Emilia Rytko, (President of ACEEEO),
Mr. Zoltán Tóth (Secretary General, ACEEEO),
Mr. Vidar Helgesen (Secretary General, International IDEA),
Mr. Richard Soudriette (President, Center for Diplomacy and
Democracy),
Ambassador Janez Lenaric (Director of the ODIHR),
Mr. Kazimierz Czaplicki (Secretary, National Electoral Office, Poland),
Mr. William Hybl (Chairman, United States Advisory Commission on
Public Diplomacy),
Electoral management bodies, board members of the Association of
European Election Officials,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to celebrate
the Association of European Election Officials' 20th
Anniversary.

The Association of European Election Officials was
created twenty years ago, in 1991. Back then, a group of
senior election officials, government and civic education
leaders and academics founded the Association and most
importantly envisioned a perspective of establishing a new
cooperation scheme between East and Central Europe on
electoral affairs.

The Republic of Hungary played an important role in the creation of ACEEEO, being one of the six countries that decided to set up the Association, and providing the facilities for it.

Twenty years ago, the world was a completely different place to what we know today. Two decades ago while some scholars predicted the Clash of Civilizations¹ others declared the End of History², while still others discussed how the world was about to become Flat³ and how Globalization had never been so deep, intense and fast⁴ ever before in human history. Twenty years ago no one could imagine today's world. Indeed, it is not flat and history is still in the making. Civilizations have not clashed. One year ago, who could possibly imagine the current Arab revolution?

One of the major changes was democratization. In 1973, the world had a total of 124 countries and territories, of which 66 were considered non-democratic, 31 were experiencing democratic transitions and only 27 were democratic. Today, the picture is quite different: the majority of countries nowadays live under democratic regimes. In fact, from 1973 to 2010, 155 countries adopted electoral democracy, and now a

¹ Samuel Huntington

² Francis Fukuyama

³ Thomas Friedman, "The World is Flat".

⁴ Joseph Stiglitz

total of 182 countries have built electoral rules for accessing power in a democratic fashion. In 2010 65 countries around the world –from a total of 198- went to the polls on 101 occasions.

However, it must be noted that all these countries which are considered formally democratic still present different degrees in the quality of elections and in the quality of democracy. While our common goal is to achieve full democracies which hold free and fair elections, accommodate and promote rights and uphold the rule of law, there is still much to be done.

Today, there is a robust and large international electoral system. However, and as stated above, holding free, fair and transparent elections is not the only objective anymore. As deeply understood by ACEEEO, as the initial transition passes, new challenges in election administration arise. In Mexico, for example, one of our initial goals was having an independent electoral management body that could organize technically precise elections. Today, we are facing different challenges that pay more attention to aspects such as equality in campaigning and electoral dispute resolution. As a result, Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute has moved from the

design of an efficient preliminary electoral results program to the implementation of a new communication model whereby the Institute is the only one authorized to allocate radio and television times to political parties.

As an example, nowadays there are many types of challenges and demands that must be met. There are many new democracies with no experience in democratic-electoral procedures and there is the need to strengthen legitimacy in EMBs. In addition there are many demands related to boundary delimitation, civic education, vote counting and voting operations. Furthermore, there is a second generation electoral agenda that includes topics such as public and private funding, elections and security, e-voting and new technologies, media access, financial oversight, transparency and electoral training, amongst others.

The Association of European Election Officials has successfully faced these challenges. The Association has evolved along with the system; it has established new goals for itself in order to fulfill the needs of its members. Thanks to Mr Zoltán Tóth's direction and vision, the ACEEEO has successfully managed to accomplish this new agenda. In the celebrated nineteenth Annual Conference, a number of electoral topics have been addressed, ranging from the

electoral roll to the protection of political rights. Today, ACEEEO is a solid organization with international prestige and future projects that seek to improve electoral democracy's quality.

ACEEEO has had an important role in the region's democratic consolidation process. As an example, ACEEEO's role in the promotion of sound democratic processes and procedures among its members helped the European Union's expansion process in 2006. Moreover, it is important to stand out that ACEEEO opened its doors to all European electoral authorities in 2006.

Furthermore, ACEEEO's activities have transcended the European space. The Association has developed an important role promoting and bolstering democracy across the world, always respectful of local needs and interests and countries' sovereignty. As the IFE in Mexico, ACEEEO is convinced that there is no single political or electoral model and that each country must choose what is appropriate for them. In this process we both act as facilitators by exchanging knowledge, lessons learned and best practices.

Thanks to Mr. Zothán Toth and his staff, the Association of European Election Officials has positioned itself in the international arena; ACEEEO is associated with **International governmental organizations** such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Council of Europe, and United Nations' Electoral Assistance Division (UN-EAD), with **6 international nongovernmental organizations** - International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Charles Stewart MOTT Foundation, Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), Association of African Election Authorities (AAEA), and Freedom House Regional Office), and with **8 domestic nongovernmental organizations from eight different countries** (Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Spain) and with **43 EMBs** (21 from Europe and 22 from the other four continents). With them, ACEEEO has launched international projects regarding necessary elements of the electoral processes. Allow me to address three basic areas:

1. Voter registration and voters' list:

ACEEEO published the *Handbook on Voters Registration in Transitional Democracies* with the United Nations Democracy Fund and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems; and developed a Seminar on European Parliamentary Elections Evaluation.

2. Voter's education

The Association of European Election Officials joined the Dutch Institute for Public Policy and the German Federal Center for Political Education for the project *VoteMatch Europe 2009*, which was an attractive educational tool used to inform citizens about the European Parliament elections, and published the *Handbook on Youth Voters' Education* with the European Commission.

3. Training of election officials.

Allow me to delve into this topic. Nowadays, we are facing uncommon and complex electoral problems. Thirty years ago, we were only demanded to guarantee free, fair and transparent elections.

In the last decade new dynamics have emerged, and new challenges have appeared. Oversight and control of public and private funding for political parties and campaigns; regulation of political and electoral advertisement in campaign periods; the use of new technologies for voting and tallying of votes; the immediate disclosure of preliminary electoral results; and new models of participation through social media such as Twitter or Facebook.

These new problems require that electoral officials constantly update their knowledge, in order to improve efficiency and, at the same time, contribute to improving democratic governance by means of elections.

Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute and the Association of European Election Officials signed a cooperation agreement in 2009, highlighting the importance of training officials and implementing reciprocal electoral assistance projects. At Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute we believe this type of activities not only constitute a one way process

where experiences and knowledge are simply translated. Rather, they are a two way process where we all learn and we all get training.

As a result, under this constructive partnership, ACEEEO and IFE have developed three international workshops on electoral training: in 2008 with Bosnia and Herzegovina's Central Electoral Commission, in 2010 with Macedonia's Central Electoral Commission and in 2011 with Ukraine's Central Electoral Commission.

Indeed, this year we hope to organize another workshop for officials from ACEEEO's member electoral management bodies in order to exchange ideas, experiences and best practices regarding the political conduction of the elections' technical aspects. Both our mistakes and achievements can help us strengthen our own electoral and democratic systems.

Since 1995, when Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute was for the first time invited to the Association's annual conferences, the IFE has witnessed the Association of European Election Officials and Mr. Zolthán Toth's strong commitment with democracy and high democratic standards. These efforts have continued. This is why on Saturday both of

us will sign an agreement compromising ACEEEO and IFE for strengthening electoral training through the International Center for Electoral Training and Research.

However, further international cooperation is required. We are living in an increasingly complex world that is not flat and surely hasn't reached the end of its history. Rather than clashing civilizations, we have found a plurality of cultures and systems with different interests and needs.

However, this is a world where we can all learn from each other and where we all have a common agenda: reaching peace and improving the lives we live. Therefore, both ACEEEO and IFE are committed to international cooperation for assisting each other's development efforts in terms of capacity building and technical assistance for strengthening our democratic institutions.

This will be done through the International Center for Electoral Training and Research. The Training Center aims to care and contribute to the formation of human capital for providing the tools and information required to meet the enormous and delicate challenges facing electoral management bodies worldwide.

We have to bear in mind that there is no development without democracy, and this is a process supported by both IFE and ACEEEO.

Congratulations ACEEEO for your 20th Anniversary!
Thank you Mr. Zolthán Toth for brightly directing the Association for the last 20 years!

Thank you Hungary for supporting democracy, as you did 20 years ago, and for offering us a home to come to from all over the world to celebrate this anniversary.

Thank you for your attention. Good afternoon.