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**Comments William J. Hybl
Chairman, U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy
2011 ACEEEO Conference
Budapest, Hungary
15-18 June 2011**

Congratulations to the Association of European Election Officials, also known as ACEEEO, on your 20th anniversary conference in beautiful Budapest.

My thanks to Dr. Zoltan Toth, ACEEEO Secretary General and the organizers for the invitation to represent the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy at this historic event.

The purposes of the Advisory Commission and ACEEEO are complimentary. The job of the Advisory Commission is to provide advice and guidance to the U.S. President and the Congress on how the United States should engage global publics, a practice often referred to as public diplomacy. A fundamental principle of U.S. public diplomacy is freedom of information and that allows publics to make informed electoral decisions.

ACEEEO is an excellent example of how people-to-people diplomacy works. Your association has an impressive record of promoting electoral integrity and professional election administration across Europe and the globe.

The fall of the Berlin Wall sparked a democratic awakening in 1989 as the countries of Central and Eastern Europe re-established competitive multi-party elections. At that time F. Clifton White the founder of the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), reached out to Hungary and proposed creating an association of election officials to develop the transparent election institutions.

IFES found an enthusiastic partner in Dr. Zoltan Toth, Head of the Elections Office as well as the Hungarian Ministry of Interior. The first conference was convened in Budapest in 1991 where election officials from six countries formed ACEEEO.

IFES remains a vigorous supporter of ACEEEO and is a sponsor of this anniversary conference. We are joined by IFES Chairman Peter Kelly and a sizeable delegation of IFES board and staff members who are here to celebrate 20 years of success of ACEEEO.

The U.S. Agency for International Development made grant of \$125,000 for the first conference in 1991. These resources together with the generous in-kind support of the Hungarian Government planted the seeds that have grown into ACEEEO.

Over two decades the association has expanded to include members from 23 countries. ACEEEO is a non-governmental organization composed of election administrators, civil society leaders, and representatives of international organizations.

The association provides election administrators with the opportunity for a free exchange of ideas and information with their peers on all aspects of the election process. ACEEEO is a successful model for promoting international cooperation in elections as evidenced by the participation of delegates from more than 40 countries at this meeting.

The timing for this conference coincides with Hungary's Presidency of the European Union. It should be mentioned that ACEEEO has played role in the recent expansion of the EU.

One of the requirements for EU admission is for countries to have transparent democratic elections. ACEEEO's work in promoting election administration played a role in assisting the ten countries from Central and Eastern Europe that joined the European Union in 2005 and 2007.

The association has worked on numerous technical assistance projects with international organizations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe,

and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. ACEEEO has offered valuable technical assistance to countries in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East and has helped to launch regional election associations in Africa and Asia.

ACEEEO is playing a particularly useful role in the effective use of election technology. Since 1991, ACEEEO has regularly hosted election technology exhibitions. At ACEEEO conferences and workshops there has been great emphasis on a wide array of topics as e-voting, election law, voter registration, voter education, and election security.

It is a great honor to join you in celebrating twenty years of success for ACEEEO. I also wish to commend Dr. Zoltan Toth for his achievements as Secretary General of ACEEEO. Thanks to Dr. Toth's skilled leadership and vision this association has truly become a leading force in the field of election administration.

I recognize the excellent work and achievement of the executive board, the members and the staff of ACEEEO. We express our appreciation to the many friends of ACEEEO's who are attending this conference.

The mission of ACEEEO has been to promote electoral integrity so that voters can trust that their votes will be counted. Your association has worked tirelessly to guarantee the integrity of the ballot as the preferred method of political change.

At this 20th anniversary conference we re-dedicate ourselves to the ACEEEO motto, “Not by the Force of Arms, but by the Power of the Ballot.”

Thank you.