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Honorable Mrs. President of the Association of the European Electoral Officials,
Ladies and Gentlemen members of the Association, honorable guests,

Twenty years ago, on 30 July – 2 August 1991, Budapest was a place of unusual for those days event. This is because in Hungarian capital was held a meeting of people, whose idea was to build democratic rule of law, including democratic electoral procedures. They came from different parts of the world, represented various political views, social and professional environment, but they shared one belief: about the inevitability of democratic change of regime in our region and the necessity of joint actions to support these processes.

The initiator of the meeting and the good spirit of the whole project was International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), whose long-term President and our great friend is, of course, on this special day with us.

An Organizing Committee established then for creation of Regional Association of Electoral Administrators for Central and Eastern Europe, from the beginning had a great support from the Hungarian authorities and institutions, especially from the National Electoral Office of Hungary, which strongly supports our Association to this day.

The founding fathers of our Associations, representing electoral bodies, were representatives of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia, namely countries mostly still actively participating in the work of the Association.

The guiding objective of creation of the Association of electoral officials was to build a forum for free exchange of views, experiences and opinions concerning organization of free and fair elections and determining necessary procedures and legal guarantees. In my opinion this goal is still present in activities of our Association, which on equal basis may be attended by representatives of countries with relatively well-established democracy, and countries on the path of democratic transition. This is undoubtedly a great value, we have developed together over the period of existence of our organization.

Second, no less value is the opportunity to exchange practical experiences and knowledge of reference issues, being faced or soon to be faced by the electoral bodies. The changing social, technical and economic reality poses new challenges for organizers of elections. Hence, everyday informative work of the Secretariat is so important, but also a proper selection of issues for annual conference.

Suffice it to recall of such significant problem issues, as:

- transparency and fairness of electoral procedures and security of elections (conference in Budapest – 1993, in Moscow – 1997 and 2002, in Vilnius – 1998, in Constanta – 2008, in Yerevan – 2009)
- education of citizens and election entities (conference in Moscow – 1997, in Bratislava – 1999, in Tirana – 2004, in Strasbourg – 2007)
- use of modern technologies in elections (conference in Siofok – 1995, in Warsaw – 2000, in London – 2003)
- transparency of election campaign financing (conference in Brijuni – 2001 r.)

Workshops accompanying conferences with the participation of representatives of scientific world and international institutions (ODIHR, OSCE, Venice Commission, International IDEA, Federal Electoral Institute and others) enable us, as I believe, to constantly expand our knowledge concerning solutions supporting efforts to organize elections on higher level from both the legal and technical side. Exhibitions of electoral technologies and vendors are also a very important part of our conferences.

The achievements of our Association, genuinely big, which we use in our every day work at our home countries will be certainly mentioned many times.

I would like to however, from the perspective of nearly twenty years of my participation in the structures of the Association, to show yet another great value that comes from our joint work. I am referring to a specific type of relationship that unfolds between us. Despite the sometimes considerable distance between our countries, we want and are able to maintain contacts not only at the institutional level, but also personal.

We are able to enjoy electoral achievements of others, and their prosperity in their personal lives.

Therefore I have been coming to annual meeting of the Association with great joy. Knowing well, that I'll be seeing – please forgive me that I will mention only some of you –good friends for many years:

Lívia Skultétyová, Director of Department of Elections and Referendum, Ministry of the Interior of Slovakia (unfortunately not participating in our meetings anymore), Zenonas Vaigauskas, Chairman of the Central Election Commission of Lithuania, Arnis Cimdars – Chairman of the Central Election Commission of Latvia, mentioned before Richard Soudriette, Paul DeGregorio, Manuel Lopez – president of the IFE from Mexico.

Special words of reminiscence are due to the Secretary General of the Association Zoltan Tóth, from the very beginning executing his duties with great commitment. I will not be far from the truth considering, that achievement, position and high authority of the Association in international movement for democratic elections is the merit of Zoltan Tóth. Also the support of the Secretariat was very significant in his actions and in activities of the Association. Ladies and Gentlemen working in the Secretariat have been always creating friendly atmosphere, providing any assistance needed. Thank you for that.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that, in my opinion, Association as for a twenty-year old is very programmatically and organizationally mature, although certainly has not exhausted its abilities of wise and effective actions to strengthen and promote the idea of free and fair elections. I am honored to participate in this work.

Thank you for your attention!

Warsaw – Budapest, June 2011.