



## **24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference and General Assembly of the Association of European Elections Officials**

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### **Introduction**

In many European countries, domestic observers are becoming a key player in increasing the efficiency, transparency and public confidence in the electoral process;

Election Management Bodies can benefit from the specific contribution of domestic observers when it comes to improving the conduct of elections, and therefore have an interest in enhancing their capacities through continuous training;

The Division of Electoral Assistance of the Council of Europe has been working to enhance the monitoring capacities of domestic observers all over Europe and ACEEEO members can benefit from our experience and co-operation.

### **1. Civic observers as electoral stakeholders**

Election observation is aimed at ensuring the conformity of the conduct of elections at different levels with national and international norms and practices;

- While international observation of elections has long been recognised as enhancing the efficiency and transparency of elections, the important contribution by domestic observers is being everyday more acknowledged in Europe;
- Domestic observers cover the entire election process from the beginning to the end, including the pre-electoral period, Election Day, and the post-election period;

- Civil society organizations play an essential role in efficiently assessing the conduct of elections in a specific field (voters' lists, complaint processes, intimidation and human rights abuses, media monitoring, etc.);
- National observers are familiar with local languages and customs, understand the political environment and are able to follow in detail specific election procedures;
- Domestic observers continue to work on improving the electoral process after international observers are gone. Indeed, over the last years, the importance of domestic election observation has grown significantly;
- National observers follow up on election-related cases, come up with action plans for further improvement of the election process and watch whether key stakeholders take recommendations into consideration in-between elections. Their observations are vital for the transparency of the electoral process – in three ways:
  - Gathering information and documenting facts about the election process;
  - Assessing the facts/information in order to understand to which degree elections are held in compliance with international standards; and
  - Implementing recommendations of the international election observation missions thus contributing to the reform process in post-election periods.

## **2. Role of EMBs (Electoral Management Bodies) in training civic observers, as well as potential benefits from their interaction**

- These assessments are powerful tools for promoting democratic procedures, political rights and good governance;
- EMBs can benefit from their input when it comes to enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the electoral process;
- If domestic observers become more specialized and operate more and more professionally, they contribute to promote confidence in the electoral process – and in the long run to the sustainability of democracy;
- While many domestic observers have become more professional and as a consequence more influential, they need constant upgrade in terms of new trends in the field of elections. This implies interpretation by the European Court of Human Rights of the Article 3 to the Protocol 1 and electoral standards, but also the practice of the states from which they can learn;

### **3. Methods, techniques and organizational training structures (based on the Council of Europe's experience)**

The Division of Electoral Assistance at the Council of Europe contributes to enhance the capacities of national observers through three main types of activities:

#### **- Training of domestic observers**

- In the past, the Division of Electoral Assistance trained national observers to oversee elections in different countries of the Eastern Partnership;
- For instance, 5000 national observers were trained to oversee the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine of 25 May and 26 October 2014;
- With this view, two Handbooks have been developed for domestic election observers on using international standard and reporting on elections.

#### **- International expertise**

- The Division also avails the experience of international experts to assist civil society organisations in their election observation efforts.
- For example, in Moldova we have provided an assessment of the training of LTOs and STOs and recommended action to address new challenges for domestic observers' actions, such as a three-day training before the elections, an harmonization of deadlines, logistic tools and the creation of templates for a more clear structure of the reports;
- Ahead of the local elections in Ukraine of next month, two international experts have assisted domestic observers in developing a methodology for the monitoring of campaign finance and women participation.

#### **- Training of domestic observers**

However, the added value of our contribution is that we can bring together domestic observers from the different Council of Europe's member States:

- Ahead of the last parliamentary elections in Turkey, we facilitated an exchange between Ukrainian and Turkish domestic observers to share experiences of their observation efforts;

- More important, we contribute to the exchanges among peers in the framework of the NGO network for elections observation, a platform of civil society organisations in charge of observing elections in the countries of Eastern Partnership.
- In the framework of this Network we recently contributed to the organisation of a two-day training for domestic election observers on media and PR work during elections. The training joined almost 20 participants from Eastern Partnership countries and contributed to improve the communication efforts and effectiveness of media and PR work of NGOs and to share experiences on European election practices among NGOs from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

### **Conclusion and steps ahead**

- Benefiting from our experience and the added value of these three kinds of activities, the Division is currently updating the two handbooks for domestic observers.
- This time, the update of the handbooks is headed towards the development of an e-learning platform.
- The aim of the e-learning course is to give the opportunity to domestic observers to improve their writing skills and knowledge of international standards and to get certified from the Council of Europe.
- The Division of Electoral Assistance stance ready to cooperate with those national election administrations interested in enhancing the capabilities of domestic observers and their contribution towards building better democracies in Europe.

More information at: [www.coe.int/electoral-assistance](http://www.coe.int/electoral-assistance)