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EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

in co-operation with
THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR AND KINGDOM RELATIONS OF THE NETHERLANDS
and **THE ELECTORAL COUNCIL OF THE NETHERLANDS**

**6th EUROPEAN CONFERENCE
OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES**

“ENHANCING PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS”

**Steigenberger Kurhaus Hotel
Scheveningen/The Hague, 30 November – 1 December 2009**

SYNOPSIS

The Sixth European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies – “Enhancing participation in elections” was organised by the Venice Commission in co-operation with the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands and the Electoral Council of the Netherlands on 30 November – 1 December 2009. The issues which were addressed during the conference included the recent elections in Member States, as well as measures aimed at attracting voters to participate in elections, organisation of the information campaigns before the vote and the problem of criteria for disenfranchising voters.

Around 75 participants from national electoral management bodies of the following countries attended the conference: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and United Kingdom as well as representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Directorate General of Democracy and Political Affairs.

Representatives of the following international and regional organisations also attended this event: the Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the European Commission and the European Parliament.

The Conference was opened by Ms A. Bijleveld, State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands, Mr H. Kummeling, Chairman of the Electoral Council of the Netherlands and Ms M. Stavniychuk, Deputy Head of the Presidential Secretariat of Ukraine, Member of the Venice Commission. The Conference was also addressed by Ms M. Alanis Figueroa, President of the Electoral Tribunal of Mexico.

Reports were presented by Mr E. Tanchev, President of the Constitutional Court of Bulgaria, Member of the Venice Commission, Ms M. van den Broeke, Deputy Spokesperson and Head of the Press Unit at the European Parliament, Mr E. Abrahamson, Solicitor, London, United Kingdom and Mr G. Golosov, Professor at the University of St Petersburg, Russian Federation.

Three workshops were organised on measures aimed at attracting voters to participate in elections, organisation of the information campaigns before the vote and the problem of criteria for disenfranchising of voters.

The Conference:

- 1) Took note of the information provided by participants about different elections organised in their respective countries in 2009.
- 2) Underlined the importance of the existing commitments:
 - a. to ensure the implementation of the rights enshrined in Article 3 Protocol 1 of the 'European Convention on Human Rights' and the applicable case-law of the European Court of Human Rights;
 - b. to implement the obligations and commitments of other respective international instruments – including the Copenhagen Document of the OSCE.
- 3) Invited the Member States of the Venice Commission to ensure that all principles for free and fair elections as enshrined in the 'Code of Good Practice in Electoral matters' adopted by the 'Venice Commission' in October 2002 are respected, both with regard to voters'

participation in elections in general and to limitations to the right to participate in elections in particular.

- 4) Underlined the importance of specific measures focused on attracting electors to participate in elections, notably:
 - a. making electoral systems reflect as much as possible the choice of the electorate;
 - b. using more new technologies facilitating the access of voters to any information concerning any given election and creating safe and reliable mechanisms of alternative ways of voting;
 - c. conducting educational and general information campaigns about different elections.
- 5) Pointed out that in the field of disenfranchisement of voters the States should ensure that:
 - a. Conditions (including legal conditions) for recognition of political parties, and for access to the ballot for political parties and candidates competing for an election, are not unreasonably restrictive;
 - b. Requirements, for example, concerning minimum age, residence, and also provisions relating to incompatibility of offices are based on reasonable and justifiable criteria,
 - c. Deprivation of the right to vote and to be elected should take place in conformity with the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.
- 6) The three workshops held on attracting electors to participate in elections, on Information campaigns on specific elections and on criteria for disenfranchising electors concluded that:
 - a. Political parties could play an important role in increasing voters' turnout during the elections;
 - b. The way pre-electoral campaigns are conducted has an important impact on the knowledge of the process by the electorate;
 - c. Electoral management bodies should pay particular attention to the way the information about past and future elections is presented to voters and to different general voter-information campaigns;
 - d. Co-operation between different public bodies responsible for organising and conducting elections as well as with the civil society should be encouraged,
 - e. EMBs should consider how to ensure the minimum procedural guarantees for the exercise of the right to vote by special groups of voters.
- 7) Invited the Electoral Management Bodies to provide the Secretariat of the Venice Commission with their current electoral legislation if possible in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe.
- 8) Requested the Secretariat of the Venice Commission to continue to provide the secretariat of the European Conferences of Election Management Bodies.
- 9) Welcomed the information about the request of México to become a full Member of the Venice Commission.

The 7th European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies will take place in London in June 2010. The representative of Austria informed the participants that his country intended to host the 8th conference in 2011.