



**CHAIRMANSHIP EXPERT SEMINAR ON ELECTORAL
MANAGEMENT BODIES
VIENNA, 16-17 JULY 2009
OPENING REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR MARINAKI**

I would like to warmly welcome expert participants, delegations, representatives of the civil society and other international organizations and colleagues from the OSCE institutions and field operations to this Chairmanship Seminar on Electoral Management Bodies.

Dialogue on election-related issues has been ongoing in different forums within the OSCE for several years. Election-related issues have been intensively discussed practically every year since 2004. There have been discussions during Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings, Human Dimension Committee meetings, expert meetings, informal and formal consultations and briefings.

Last year, the Finnish Chairmanship organized two Expert Seminars on election-related issues. The first, held in July 2008 in Vienna, discussed the implementation of existing commitments, election observation and election assistance (including the parliamentary dimension), and good practices in follow-up activities with some country examples. The second expert seminar, organized in October 2008 in Finland, focused on the issue of electronic voting in the framework of the municipal elections in Helsinki.

The Greek Chairmanship has decided to continue the broad dialogue on election-related issues by focusing this year on the role of electoral management bodies in ensuring that an election process is conducted in accordance with OSCE commitments. This seminar is first and foremost a forum for national election administrators to share the challenges they commonly face in administering their elections in an impartial, professional

and independent manner, and a possible chance to share best practices in this area.

Let me attempt to broadly define the subject of our discussions from the outset of this Seminar. This is no easy task, since it is well known that within our OSCE region there is no single model of Election Management Body that would readily fit into every environment. It is therefore reasonable to ask “what are Electoral Management Bodies?”

An Electoral Management Body is the organization or body that in any given participating State has the sole purpose of managing some or all elements that are essential for the conduct of elections, such as determining who is eligible to vote, receiving and validating nomination of election participants, conducting polling, counting and tabulating votes. Electoral Management Bodies are also legally responsible for these essential functions. They may also undertake other tasks, such as voter registration, delimitation of electoral constituencies, election dispute-resolution, voter education, etc.

The proper administration of democratic elections requires that election administration bodies perform their duties in a professional and impartial manner, independent from any political interests, and that their acts and decisions be subject to judicial review. These are critical issues, given that the election administration machinery makes and implements important decisions that may have an impact on the overall conduct and even on the outcome of elections.

An essential responsibility of Electoral Management Bodies is to ensure that elections take place in accordance with national legislation and in accordance with OSCE commitments and standards. Another key responsibility is to provide, in a timely manner, corrective measures when irregularities or violations challenge the integrity of the election process. Election commissions, courts or other bodies may be involved in this

process. It is paramount that jurisdictions are clearly defined in the law, so as to avoid confusion over which body should adjudicate which complaint. The powers and responsibilities of various bodies involved in adjudicating complaints should also be regulated by law. It is also crucial to avoid situations in which the same complaint is filed in two different bodies that may deliver conflicting verdicts.

A number of participating States have taken measures to strengthen their election processes. These steps often address OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and concerns arising from domestic participants in the election process. The discussions today and tomorrow could address the methods used by electoral management bodies to improve the election process.

It is important, in this context, to mention the role of civil society. Representatives of civil society are the ones that hold Electoral Management Bodies to account and in various cases provide support to them, helping them be more efficient in carrying out their tasks.

OSCE participating States have accumulated vast experience in holding successive competitive elections in using different models of election administration. Their election management bodies also have experienced various challenges with regard to their independence and impartiality as well as in building public confidence in the election process. Of these, Ambassador Lenarcic will speak in a minute.

Lastly, let me stress that your individual country experiences are valuable to us all. I would, therefore, like to encourage you to share these experiences with each other in the context of searching for possible ways of improving the individual performance of our Electoral Management Bodies.