

**Closing Remarks by
Ambassador Janez Lenarčič**
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions
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at the

**OSCE Chairmanship Expert Seminar
on Electoral Management Bodies**

Neuer Saal, Hofburg, Vienna

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been a true pleasure to have been here at this expert seminar and I thank the Chairmanship for organizing this unique opportunity for election administrators across the OSCE area to exchange practices and views.

It has been most interesting to hear how election management bodies from various jurisdictions with diverse structures and electoral systems deal with the underlying responsibility of election administrators: to ensure that elections are organized in accordance with OSCE commitments and national legislation.

What is clear from the discussion over the past two days is that there are fundamental principles that must govern the work of all election management bodies, regardless of the model chosen, of which Ambassador Marinaki spoke a minute ago. These are the principles of

- transparency,
- integrity in applying the law, and
- accountability.

These principles are indispensable for building public confidence.

A number of elements have been mentioned as important to transparency, but the primary point is that voters, political parties and candidates, domestic and international observers, and the media should have broad access to the work of election management bodies. A number of election administrators here have spoken about the opportunities afforded by the Internet to enhance transparency by making decisions and documents publicly available, as well as by posting, on the Internet, the preliminary results by polling station level. The practice of openness allows all stakeholders to check that the election management bodies are indeed working impartially and professionally. In short, transparency is essential for public confidence.

Second, integrity. Some of the elements held to be important to integrity were identified as the need to ensure a level playing field for competition among political parties and candidates. A number of States face particular challenges in this respect in areas such as access to the media and campaign financing. A fully transparent system of counting votes and reporting the results is also essential for the integrity of elections.

In this respect, election management bodies must investigate or bring to the attention of the relevant authorities any indications

or allegations that fraud or manipulations have occurred. Whether manipulations affect the final results or not is not important: they must be addressed because they otherwise sap the integrity of the process and seriously undermine public confidence. This is the element of accountability that underpins the work of election management bodies.

Electronic voting is another area which may present challenges to the integrity of elections, and a number of participants expressed the wish to continue discussions on this topic. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the ODIHR Discussion Paper on *Preparation of Guidelines for the Observation of Electronic Voting* which is available outside, as well as on the ODIHR website.

Another crucial element of integrity is the ability to recognize mistakes, gaps in the law, and shortcomings in practice, and to make improvements designed to overcome these challenges. The view that election administrators should be responsive to concerns was expressed by a number of participants as vital to meaningful transparency, accountability and integrity.

We have heard how election management professionals - as the experts on the ground - can be involved in raising questions and proposing reforms to those who make policy decisions. All of us

need to recognise that we can't rest on our laurels, we are never finished with improving the electoral process.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

In my opening remarks to this Seminar I said that elections do not solely 'belong' to governments, election managers, or candidates. Their main stakeholders are the voters. And I agree with Chairman Churov when he just said in his presentation in the third working session that election administration is a key strategic resource for any participating State.

It is clear that this resource should be utilised for the benefit of the voters so as to ensure that the election result faithfully reflects their will.

Thank you.