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2021 Snap Parliamentary Elections in Armenia: Reflect, learn, innovate Lessons Learned Conference

10 September 2021

Recommendations

1. **Legal Framework.** While overall electoral legal framework provides adequate basis for conducting free, fair, transparent and credible elections, in line with Venice Commission Code of Good Practice on Electoral Matters the Parliament should refrain from changing the Electoral Code less than one year before the Election Day to provide the Central Election Commission, political parties and candidates to prepare effectively to the electoral process and voters to understand the electoral system and the voting procedures. The change of the voting procedure eliminating the use of pen for casting ballot papers overall was perceived positively providing advantages for the simplification of the counting process that was largely assessed positively.
2. **Election Administration.** All electoral stakeholders, including international and national observers, acknowledged that snap parliamentary elections have been managed professionally and transparently.
 - a. **Strengthening capacity of the CEC.** The CEC should be provided with sufficient resources to implement its mandate efficiently as it has the capacity and will for further enhancement of its institutional capacity utilizing the strategic approach.
 - b. **Training of election officials.** Both trainings for the election commissioners and the VAD operators were highly positively assessed both by the participants and by the recipients of their work acknowledging that election commissioners and VAD operators were well prepared and implemented their duties without serious failures. The system of training of election officials could be further strengthened through building capacity of the CEC Training and Resource Center to take leading role in developing curriculums for all electoral stakeholders, training and certification of the election officials' in-between elections and creating a pool of certified election officials. Conducting such trainings in-between elections will ensure higher quality of the trainings and examination. A practice of refreshing trainings for election officials before each election should be continued. Precinct election commission's chairs and secretaries should receive the specialized trainings on their duties. More emphasis should be paid to the tabulation and packing procedures where commissioners face the most difficulties.
 - c. **Licensing of the candidates to the precinct election commissioners.** The CEC should establish a stricter system of examination and licensing of the candidates to the precinct



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election commissioners that will ensure higher performance of the precinct election commissioners.

- d. **The CEC should expand its online training facilities** which will complement the face-to-face training. Passing the online course for the election commissioners and VAD operators could be a pre-requisite for participation in the face-to-face trainings and certification/licensing. The specialized training courses for all stakeholders, including but not limited to political parties' proxies, election observers, judges, police should be developed.

3. Use of the ICT in elections and cybersecurity

- a. **CEC website and Electoral Management System.** Newly launched CEC website is a modern and interactive tool that allows the CEC to provide voters and all electoral stakeholders comprehensive, accurate and timely information in a user-friendly manner that was acknowledged by international and national observers. It requires further enhancement though introduction of the new modules, including on the election dispute resolution, candidates, political parties, observers' and journalists' registration as well as further step-by-step transfer of the electoral management system elements from desktop platform to the web-based which will allow CEC to provide real-time information on all electoral operations contributing to even greater transparency aiming to accelerate trust to the electoral process.
- b. **Voter registration and voter authentication.** The introduction of the electronic voter authentication with the use of the Voter Authentication Devices (VADs) ensured fundamental electoral principle "One voter – one vote" and significantly changed the perception of the electoral process that many voters recognize as a civilized process and was positively assessed by both international and national observers. The practice of proper maintenance of the VADs should continue to ensure their further effective use during next electoral cycles.
- c. **Further digitalization of the electoral process.** The results of the focus groups and in-depth interviews show the demand of all electoral stakeholders on further expand on the use of the ICT in the electoral process. The CEC may consider options for further digitalization of the electoral process, including at voting, counting and tabulation of election results.
- d. **Cybersecurity.** For the first time in the Armenian history, the CEC website and IT infrastructure were under massive attack on the Election night posing significant risk for the perception of electoral integrity. The CEC should receive a comprehensive assistance based on the initial cybersecurity assessment which shall identify needs for hardware and software procurement, training of the CEC IT personnel, developing cybersecurity protocols and cyber hygiene trainings for all electoral stakeholders, especially for election officials.

4. **Election Dispute Resolution.** There is a need to continue efforts to increase the efficiency and the transparency of administrative proceedings and handling of electoral complaints.





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There is a need for careful studying of the election disputes arose during the snap parliamentary elections to identify their nature and reasons aiming to prevent them in the future.

5. Voter education

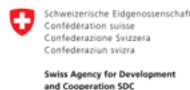
- a. **Comprehensive civic and voter education in-between elections.** Ensuring a general understanding of the electoral processes as well as citizens' participation through the provision of information, public outreach and engagement can serve to build trust amongst citizens and voters as it enhances transparency and inclusivity. Comprehensive civic and voter education campaigns should be conducted in-between elections to form the knowledge, values and skills needed for efficient exercise of the citizens' and electoral rights providing a basis for meaningful political and electoral participation.
- b. **Further targeting of the voter education campaigns.** From one electoral cycle to another, the CEC is enhancing its voter education tailoring different target audiences and engaging specialized NGOs as a positive practice. At the same time, some observers' reports and the results of the focus groups conducted among voters showed that voter education campaign was not enough visible. For the future electoral cycles, the CEC should partner more with the civil society groups on conducting voter education.
- c. **Channels of voter education.** Modern mass media such as internet TV/Radio and cable TV/Radio shall be utilized as a tool to promote civic and voter education. While television remain the main source of information for most of the Armenian voters, quick spread of the social media use, especially among young generation require further expand of use of social media networks for civic and voter education. The CEC should consider broader use of the face-to-face voter education activities

6. Accessibility of the electoral process

- a. Both international and national observers reports as well as results of the focus groups and in-depth interviews among voters, election commissioners, political parties' representatives acknowledged the low level of the accessibility of the polling stations and limited alternative possibilities for voters with disabilities to vote. Authorities should take efforts on ensuring physical accessibility of the polling stations and may consider extending practice of mobile voting for all voters with limited mobility and introduction of the interactive map of the accessible polling stations on the CEC website to allow voters with disabilities to choose the accessible polling station.

7. Inclusiveness of the electoral process

- a. **Women's participation.** Women actively participated in the snap parliamentary elections, constituting 54,45 % of those who participated in elections. The number of women elected as MPs increased by 10 % comparatively to the previous parliamentary elections from 24.24% to 34.58% continuing positive dynamic for reaching gender equality. Regrettably, women remain underrepresented at the local level, presenting by just 10 % female deputies in the local councils, requiring further efforts to ensure gender equality at all levels.





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- b. **Youth participation.** From 723 728 voters from 18 to 34 years old included in the voter list, 335845 voters have participated in elections, constituting 46,40 %, necessitating youth mobilizing campaign to promote active citizenship.
- c. **National minorities participation.** CEC commendable efforts on providing voter education materials and information on electoral contestants in the national minorities' languages is a welcomed practice which should continue providing voters from national minorities wider spectrum of the information regarding electoral process contributing to their better integration and active civic participation.

8. Preventing of COVID-19 within electoral operations

- a. Preventive COVID-19 measures taken by the CEC during pre-term parliamentary elections were well perceived by all electoral stakeholders providing confidence on safety of the electoral process and ability to vote or to perform duties on the election day without fear of being infected. As a result, just 55 new cases were registered on the 14th day after elections witnessing that electoral process hasn't contributed to further spread of the COVID-19. At the same time, observers mentioned cases on non-compliance with COVID-19 protocol requiring additional voter education campaign to promote adhering of COVID-19 preventive measures if the pandemic of COVID-19 still continues.

