Seminar on

Synergies between Population and Voter Registration: Implications for the Accuracy of Voter Lists

Warsaw
31 August - 1 September 2011

Overview

The Seminar on *Synergies between Population and Voter Registration: Implications for the Accuracy of Voter Lists* (31 August – 1 September 2011) provided an opportunity for representatives of participating States to present and discuss good practices in efficient data sharing between election and population registration authorities for the process of compiling voter lists. It further provided a platform for discussion on policies that could to be taken into consideration by national authorities to secure relevant data and increase the accuracy of registration data. The Seminar gathered 60 participants, including representatives of 16 participating States represented either by relevant population registration or election authorities, representatives of 9 OSCE field operations and representatives of the International Foundation For Electoral Systems (IFES), the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the EC-UNDP Taskforce on Electoral Assistance. Seminar participants were aided by the expertise and insights of keynote speakers.

Presentations from relevant authorities of OSCE participating States elaborated the mechanisms that their States employ for the purpose of generating voter lists. While in many participating States the compilation of voter lists is a responsibility of the election authorities, some participating States entrust the production of voter lists to population registration authorities.

Discussions during the Seminar highlighted that in many OSCE participating States voter registers and voter lists are drawn from the data stored in the state-wide population register. Through dedicated presentations, representatives of population registration authorities of Albania, Armenia, Finland, and Lithuania presented their national system of extracting voter lists from their national population register.

Presentations of election authorities of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Poland and Ukraine provided an overview of the system to generate voter lists from the central voter register maintained by the election authorities. These presentations highlighted the notion that data in the central voter register is largely based on the information provided either directly or in a certified format by population registration authorities.

Discussions also emphasized the importance of co-ordination between election and population registration authorities in the process of generating voter lists. In this context, through presentations and subsequent discussions, participants addressed the manner of sharing information and the regulatory framework that governs this process. Some discussions also addressed the cost effectiveness and sustainability of maintaining population registers and/or central voter registers.

The Seminar participants agreed on 11 specific conclusions that should be taken into account when building an efficient system of generating voter lists.

Conclusions and Recommendations[1]

1. The generation of voter lists is not exclusively the responsibility of election authorities. In many OSCE participating States, voter lists are produced directly from the population register. Whenever voter lists are based on passive voter registration systems, population register officials should also be consulted and co-ordination with election authorities maintained.

2. Regardless of whether election or population registration authorities are responsible for generating voter lists, the same principles of voter registration apply to both:

   - Inclusiveness
   - Accuracy
   - Transparency
   - Accountability

3. Proving eligibility to register to vote or stand as a candidate should be based on documentary evidence.

4. In the process of population registration, as well as in updating central voter registers, relevant authorities process identity and other personal data. This data should be used only for electoral purposes and other purposes defined by law. Consequently, when compiling voter lists, appropriate data protection measures should be put in place.

5. In those participating States with an established administrative tradition of registering civil status data and residence, establishing passive voter registration systems and generating voter lists from the population register may be considered as a practical way forward when considering improvements to the voter registration process.

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[1] These good practices and recommendations have no official status and are not based on the consensus of OSCE participating States. Their inclusion in this report does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the OSCE/ODIHR.

6. Representatives of national election authorities responsible for voter registration noted the need to aggregate all national data on voters in one central voter register. Where such a central voter register exists, source data used to update the register is drawn largely from the registers maintained by population registration authorities.

7. Where data from other public registers is used to update central voter registers, it is necessary that communication between relevant officials takes place in the context of a well-defined legal framework that governs this process.

8. The compilation and maintenance of separate population and voter registers in parallel may not be resource and cost efficient. In the short-term, developing a population registration system may seem more expensive than developing voter registers. However, in the long-term higher costs may be justified, bearing in mind that population registers can provide a wide range of benefits and products besides voter lists. Building a population register takes time and authorities should keep realistic timelines in mind. Rushing with implementation may be counter-productive and undermine the sustainability of the system.

9. Population registration authorities need to work on developing systems to accurately assign addresses to voters. In some OSCE participating Sates this is proving challenging, as many people, in particular, internal economic migrants fail to report changes of residence or are not able to do so, as they can not meet specific administrative criteria for registration.

10. While generally being a reliable tool to generate voter lists, population registers often lack certain information that is relevant for the compilation of voter lists. Among others, this includes information on persons who have lost their right to vote by a court decision, or persons who in practice live in a region which is not their place of permanent residence, such as students, the military service, or sailors. Usually, relevant judicial, military or maritime institutions maintain their own registers with this information that needs to be taken into account when compiling voter lists.

11. Developing comprehensive official address registers with unique parameters is a good way of ensuring accurate and reliable address information and, thus, creating more accurate voter registers