



## **Intervention on Behalf of the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE)**

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Civil Society Election Observers:

A Relevant and Important Player in Democratic Elections

I am glad to present you today in Warsaw a new initiative for the support of free elections in Europe: The “European Platform for Democratic Elections”. This platform has been installed in December 2012 here in Warsaw.

The European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) is a bottom-up initiative of thirteen European civil society organisations conducting or supporting citizens’ election observation in eleven European states. Our member organisations come from the EU, from the Eastern Partnership countries and from the Russian Federation. The EU the members come from Poland (Stefan Batory Foundation), Sweden (SILC Institute), Norway (Norwegian Helsinki Committee) and Germany (European Exchange).

The EPDE has eight members form the Eastern Partnership countries: Belarus (Human Rights Centre Viasna and Belarusian Helsinki Committee),

Moldova (PromoLex), Ukraine (Committee of Voters of Ukraine and citizens network OPORA), Azerbaijan (Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre EMDS), from Armenia (Helsinki Citizens Assembly Vanadzor) and Georgia (ISFED). Our member organisation from the Russian Federation is the Association GOLOS.

The network has three main objectives:

- we want to increase the professional know-how and improve observation techniques and methodologies of our member organisations through peer learning and experts' training
- we want to raise the awareness for citizens' election observation as an additional information source for the assessment of the quality of elections – complementary to the findings of international election observation missions
- we try to provide assistance to those member organisations which are under pressure – today this affects three of our thirteen member organisations: those in Belarus (Ales Beliakki, director of our member organisation Viasna is in prison since more than 2 years, the organisation is working without registration since almost 10 years), Azerbaijan (EMDS our Azerbaijan member organisation has lost registration and is working under permanent pressure) and GOLOS, our Russian member organisation which is declared to be a foreign agent and has to restructure its complete working structure in these days.

Citizens' election observation is important and necessary mainly for two reasons:

1. Citizens' – domestic – election observation is a perfect tool for exerting public control over the election process. Networks of

citizens' election observation can motivate voters to become active as volunteers and to become personally involved in public affairs.

Support for citizens' election observation is identical with support for transparency of democratic procedures and is a contribution to consolidation of democratic standards – wherever free elections are at risk in the OSCE region.

2. Professional and unbiased citizens' observation increases the quality of international election observation missions. Members of international observation missions may receive valuable information on the process of candidates' registration and agitation as well as on the political background from citizens' long-term observers in the target countries.

I will close my presentation with a small set of recommendations to those international organisations that already support or intend to support citizens' election observation in the OSCE region:

1. Where election dates are as a rule well known for years in advance civil society never knows in advance about the thematic focus and the dates of upcoming calls for proposals and often has to develop observation strategy, methods and operation in only a very few months ahead of the elections. This situation extremely restricts the quality of election observation. Funders should develop long-term strategies for citizens' election observation in Europe
2. Citizens' election observation needs a long-term commitment and therefore institutional support. Election observation requires longstanding networks of activists, permanent development and update of methods and techniques and a well developed contacts to local media and political stakeholders – this means that a long-term

and sustainable funding strategy for citizens' election observation is indispensable.

3. Stefan Fule' motto "more for more" is not applicable for citizens' election observation. Democracy support needs a "more for less" – the more free elections are at risk the greater should be international awareness and support for those election observers that stand for the transparency of the election process in their countries.

The EPDE is ready to contribute recommendations for a development strategy in the field of citizens' election observation for any interested international organisation.