



Strasbourg, 5 October 2023

***CONCEPT***

## **CONFERENCE**

***IMPROVING ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND ELECTIONS:***

### **“THE ROLE OF ELECTORAL TRAINING CENTRES”**

***Council of Europe,***

***STRASBOURG FRANCE***

**28-29 November 2023**

Conference organised by the  
Division of Elections and Participatory Democracy

For several years, the Council of Europe, through its Secretary General and institutions, as well as many organisations engaged in promoting human rights and democracy, have been issuing warnings about **democratic backsliding across the world**<sup>1</sup>.

If democratic elections are considered as the cornerstone of democracy, **public confidence in the electoral process itself however is** decreasing, as shown by continually low turnouts<sup>2</sup> at the polls throughout Europe. This worrisome trend inevitably leads to the growing questioning of the legitimacy of governments, democratic institutions and elected representatives.

Responsive to these alarming trends, the Heads of States of Council of Europe member States appealed in their final declaration of the **4<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Council of Europe which took place in Reykjavík** on 16-17 May 2023, to restore the trust and public confidence in electoral processes and to encourage democratic participation of every citizen at all levels through free and fair elections, underlining that it **is essential to hold elections and referenda in accordance with international standards**<sup>3</sup>.

Electoral management bodies (EMBs) managing electoral processes, are therefore crucial for the good functioning of democratic institutions. They should guarantee the principles of independence, integrity, transparency and efficiency<sup>4</sup> and ensure professionalism and training of election administration members and staff, but also of other categories of stakeholders who play an important role in the electoral process<sup>5</sup>.

While observing these standards in practice, in most of their reports, international election observation missions state that the elections were “generally well-administered”, but the **need to improve training, and to enhance professionalism** of the election administration at all levels is also **almost always listed among the priority recommendations**.

There is a gap, and electoral training centres play a crucial role to fill it.

Among the 46 Council of Europe member States, some have well-established electoral training centres (within or outside the EMB structure), others have started to establish one, and finally among those which do not have such a structure, several are considering establishing one in the short or medium term.

According to research carried out by International IDEA (2023), and Garnett (2019)<sup>6</sup>, more could

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<sup>1</sup> *Inter alia*: [Council of Europe Secretary General’s report 2021](#) (preface) ; [Freedom House: “Democracy under siege” 2021](#); [“The Global State of Democracy Report 2021](#), Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era”, International IDEA;

<sup>2</sup> [Council of Europe’ Secretary General’s report 2023](#), p68

<sup>3</sup> [Reykjavík declaration “United around our values”](#), Reykjavík Summit 16-17 May 2023

<sup>4</sup> [Code of good practice in electoral matters](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Venice Commission: 14<sup>th</sup> European Conference of EMBs – synopsis and conclusions](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Training and professional development in electoral administration](#), IDEA May 2023 / [Electoral management and the organisational determinants of electoral integrity](#)

be done in this respect: training and capacity building provisions seem to be absent from electoral management literature.

*What are electoral training centres and what is their additional value?*

The main goals of an electoral training centre are to provide standardised, high-quality training for the members of the election administration at all levels, ensuring that they obtain the necessary expertise and competencies to make and implement election procedures that comply with the national legal framework and procedures, as well as international standards.

However, depending on the electoral legislation, mandates and resources, the role of training centres could encompass many additional responsibilities going far beyond the training of electoral officials. In practice, having such a structure represents many advantages for the election administration.

There is a need for further training of electoral officials due to more complex electoral legislation, higher expectations from electoral stakeholders and voters, as well as new challenges and threats, including difficulties to recruit electoral officials, fight against dis/misinformation, interference in the electoral process and cyber-attacks.

Electoral processes need to be strengthened and to become more robust and resilient to guarantee the holding of democratic elections even in times of crisis<sup>7</sup>.

The Council of Europe has adopted and follows the implementation of specific reference standards in the field of elections. From the international obligations of its member States, anchored in [Art 3 of Protocol 1 of the ECHR and the subsequent ECtHR case law](#), the legal and constitutional groundwork and international electoral standard setting by the Venice Commission. The Council of Europe also provides election observations at national and local levels carried out by the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) and [the Congress for Local and Regional Authorities](#), as well as the support and technical cooperation on various aspects of elections, such as capacity building of electoral stakeholders before and after election day, including the support to the establishment of training centres such as in the Republic of Moldova<sup>8</sup>, Georgia<sup>9</sup>, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine.

This conference intends to have a closer look at electoral training centres and to discuss their usefulness, their roles, mandate and structure. The conference also aims to highlight the main challenges and global trends related to training and capacity building of the electoral officials, the impact of trainings on the electoral environment, and to brainstorm and foster reflection and new ideas.

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<sup>7</sup> [Elections in times of Crisis](#) – Conclusions Parliamentary Conference, Bern Switzerland May 2023

<sup>8</sup> <https://cicde.md/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.electionreforms.ge/eng>

**Participants to the conference:**

- Representatives of Electoral Training Centres
- Representatives of the Election management Bodies (EMBs) of the 46 member States of the Council of Europe
- Representatives of the various institutions and departments of the Council of Europe working in the field of elections: [the Council of Europe Electoral Cycle](#)
- International experts
- Representatives of International Organisations and the Civil Society

**Proposed discussion points:**

Participants will be invited to share and discuss the following:

- Introduction of electoral training centres – Role, mission, mandate, structure, resources
- Case studies showcasing current work and experiences with regards to electoral trainings
- Analysing the impact of trainings on the electoral environment and cultural development
- Overview of how training policies are implemented in practice
- Main challenges and global trends including technologies in the electoral process
- Perspectives for strengthening the cooperation between electoral training centres among CoE member States

**Expected Outcomes:**

- Take stock of existence of electoral training centres across the Council of Europe Member States and discuss good practices and challenges related to training
- Gain a better understanding of how electoral training centres work and their added value
- Exchange knowledge and lessons in addressing how to establish and/or modernise training centres and to improve in-house capacities
- Identify areas to be developed further as well as cooperation opportunities; and establish/create a network of European Electoral Training Centres across Council of Europe Member States
- Recommend ways forward