13 Dhjetor 2017

Speech of the CEC Chairman, Klement Zguri in the conference "New Voting Technologies: Standards, Best Practices and Challenges in Implementing the Technology in Elections".

Albanian Case

Enthusiasm, the driving force for technology in the election

Albania is the ideal environment for the development of the debate on technology in elections. If the pure and cool reason, for or against technology, manages to succeed here, then it succeeds in any other environment.

Today I want to reflect on the Albanian case from a point of view which seems as realistic as well as provocative and ironic. Sometimes it helps to make the debate on the topic more vivid and be focused on the real and important issues of technology in the elections.

There is a word that accurately describes the Albanian approach to the use of technologies in the elections and this word is "enthusiasm". The debate on electoral technologies is present in Albania at least since 2008. Albanians, as people of a fragile democracy, have started this debate from the ground level and had the opportunity to give it a rational or caring approach, conservative, suspicious, untrusting, eventually progressive (i.e. steps in progress), or methodical, experimental, scientific, safe or successful.

Actually, we have not paid attention to any of these approaches. Our approach is (and we are proud of this) enthusiastic approach. We believe that Albania needs to adopt the most advanced technologies in elections, to adopt them related to every aspect of the elections, to adopt, regardless of the costs and country's material or intellectual potentials, adopt them today and implement today as well. We love technology. We have no reservations; we have no doubts. That's why our approach is enthusiastic.

Enthusiasm is our inspiration.

Anyone from the people in the audience might say that this description of the Albanian case is clearly hyperbolized because Albanians are not only enthusiastic, but have other qualities, i.e. why not qualitative with positive coloration such as rational, wise, mature , visionary, qualities that are deeply reflected even in the debate about new voting technologies.

Anyone might say that my description seems too simplified to be true.

I agree, but I still want to keep up the "enthusiastic" quality because it helps me to explain the lack of reservations and suspicion in the Albanian debate about technology in the election. Enthusiasm is the most sympathetic explanation for the lack of fear and mistrust in technology.

We have an extremely politicized electoral administration, which, unfortunately, becomes conflictual, blocking and damaging for electoral standard. therefore we want technology in the election because we believe in the neutralizing effect of technology on the electoral administration.

Konferenca "Teknologjitë e Reja të Votimit: standardet, praktikat më të mira dhe sfidat në zbatimin e teknologjisë në zgjedhje".

Page 2

We still have wrong or manipulative practices in the elections, phenomena such as vote buying or hindering voters to freely exercise their will. That's why we want technology in elections; because we believe technology keeps people away from the perpetrators.

We are not afraid of overestimating the technology in voting and Ballot counting, we are not afraid of creating perception of technology, as the solution of all election problems in Albania.

We are not afraid of misusing election technology-sation for party interests, we are not afraid that new and unknown technology can frighten voters, might make them feel insecure, or observed, that , for this reason, may decrease their participation in elections, we are not afraid that technology might have selective exceptions from the right to vote or because the results may be distorted.

Finally, we are not afraid that technology may fail in the day it is put into practise, so we do not have to think about plan "B"; for manual action plan.
For us, technology is the guarantee of all warranties.

We have reasons for this. In 2008, unexpectedly, we invented the so called "ballot counting through optical scan voting." At that time we immediately decided to have a monitor for every counting table to display every ballot, so that people watching the process would be able to see all the ballot papers in static cameras. We decided that video recording would be available to all electoral subjects that asked for it. Additionally, we decided that every Ballot Counting Centers be monitored live with closed-circuit cameras. With this we inaugurated the Ballot Counting Transparency Era in Albanian Election History.

All those who claimed that the cost was unmanageable, that there was no enough time for implementation, that the counting groups could not be trained and that they would not be able to use the system, we gave the right lesson to admit that they were wrong. The system was installed and put into operation very quickly with confidence and enthusiasm. The system worked and is still in operation today, whenever we have elections. Albania has today the most transparent voting system in the world thanks to our enthusiastic approach.

It is true, our ballot counting system is slow, prolonged, sometimes delayed, and hindering, but these are issues that are related to the rational approach of the problem, so I ignore it.

The Era of Transparency, thanks to technology, is undoubtedly a history of success for Albania, a sufficient source of confidence and inspiration for our second major step on Technology, which in the history of Albanian elections has been named "ECS (Electronic Counting System) and EVS (Electronic Verification System) ".

The two pilot projects ECS (Electronic Counting System) and EVS (Electronic Verification System) "are our technological exercise for elections of 2013, our entry/introduction into the E-election era, as are our first confrontation with failure. ECS and EVS aimed at testing the application of information technology in Fier district (for SEN) and Tirana district (for SEV) and addressed two extremely acute issues of our electoral problems, one misuse of counting teams for deforming the will of voters and the other one voting on behalf of other persons.

Both systems are competitive with classical methods of voter identification and ballot counting. Even if there is legal will and consciousness, classical methods are more effective and safer. But in 2013, the Albanian lawmaker decided to have more confidence in technology than to human potential, so they decided that technology would take over the ballot reading and voter identification.

ECS (Electronic Counting System) failed for a simple fact of incompatibility; the high number of electoral subjects in the competition did not match with the technical capacities of the counting machines; the modification of the technical capacities of the machines did not go with the short time available to the bidding company.

ECS (Electronic Counting System) failed because of its immaturity. The basic purpose of implementing this system was the verification and registration of voter turnout on the voting day, by reading the biometric identification document. The testing showed that the use of electronic identity verification significantly delayed the voting procedure, the system allowed a very high margin of error, defects caused delays, blockings and non-alignment of the figures in the columns of the result tables, hence ambiguity in counting and issuing of the result procedures . During testing of the ECS, significant deficiencies were identified in the security elements and doubts were raised about the integrity of the system in general.

In 2013, the CEC demonstrated perfect accountability when it took decision to reject the implementation of ECS as well as EVS implementation. This decision of 2013 elections in Albania avoided the inevitable conflict if the systems were to fail in the election as they failed in testing. The opposition of that time,

which decided for the implementation of technology as a condition for accepting the election result, came into power without the help of technology, but immediately passed to the opposition enthusiasm for the miraculous power of technology. The CEC that saved the election with its cool decision but it did not pass its calmness and rationality to anyone.

I also should add that although the Electoral Code provided for the CEC's obligation to issue special rules for the application of these technologies in the next elections, the failure of two pilot projects and the legal vacuum, forced the CEC not to advance further.

So, today, we are here and discuss for using of technology in elections with the same approach as our first day, enthusiastically.

I personally believe that the Era of electronic elections will have its future in Albania. I believe in the potentiality of technology in the election, but I have to say that the strength of technology does not stand in the equipment itself, but in harmony between equipments and the ability to use them.

In e-voting the ability should be demonstrated by the voters. They should be our "informaticiens".

E- Voting should be tested by election administrators.

In ECS and EVS this uniformity was created because of people's inability and technique used to cope with the task, so that the systems failed. In electronic voting and counting it is required to invest in the capability. So to happen this we should focus our attention not only to techniques but to humans/people as well.

To create and keep alive this homogeneity uniformity / we need much more than our enthusiastic approach. First of all we need rationality.

Thank you!

Konferenca "Teknologjitë e Reja të Votimit: standardet, praktikat më të mira dhe sfidat në zbatimin e teknologjisë në zgjedhje".

Page 7