Roadmap of Reform for the Central Election Commission

With the presidential election campaign fast approaching with the official start in three months’ time, NGOs and experts hold stakeholder consultations. The recent lack of political consensus over the replacement of 13 members of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the appointment of the 14 new members has postponed urgent measures needed in advance of the two national election campaigns in 2019. The CEC has earned a credit of confidence and public expectations are building up, both stemming from the fact that nearly each commissioner received a qualified majority of MP votes for their appointment. This credit should now be reinforced by the CEC demonstrating the it has real political will to substantially change the way in which it used to operate in the past.

Once the 14 CEC members have taken the oath and the CEC Chair, Deputy Chairs and the Secretary are elected, the number one priority for the renewed Commission would be to pave the way for the first local elections in amalgamated constituencies by adopting a decision to schedule the elections. Once the decision is made, the window of opportunities for internal reforms of the CEC will be opened. These reforms should include:

1. **Enhancing transparency and inclusiveness in the CEC operations:**
   - prompt publication on the CEC website of draft CEC resolutions, transcripts and minutes of CEC meetings, adopted resolutions, dissenting opinions on the resolutions, as well as other documents containing public information;
   - establishment of an Expert Council under the CEC comprising election experts and representatives of the civil society that would be tasked to discuss key draft CEC resolutions related to administration of the elections;
   - introduction of mandatory public consultations on draft CEC resolutions aimed at implementing the provisions laid down in the election laws (in particular, those setting the procedures for election districting, ensuring accessibility of the polling stations, and explaining the key election-related procedures, etc.);
   - Modernization of the CEC website to align its content and data presentation format with best practices (this should in particular include presentation of data in an open, machine-recognizable format), and to ensure accessibility of the CEC website for all groups of citizens, including people with disabilities;
   - publication of key election-related data (such as voting and tabulation results) in open data format; and
   - increasing the transparency of public procurement held by the CEC by making public all procurement documents and procurement results on the CEC website.

2. **Ensuring cyber security in elections:**
   - replacement of outdated IT equipment to protect the IT infrastructure from unauthorized access/cyber attacks;
3. Ensuring effective communications with the stakeholders:
   o development and adoption of communication strategy by the CEC aimed at determining the principles in the CEC’s communication with the stakeholders, including election participants, journalists, NGOs, observers, citizens, election administration bodies from other states etc.);
   o ensuring better communication with other public authorities to include NAPC, National Police, etc.) engaged into election process/political finance oversight to ensure effective cooperation with the respective agencies and avoid duplication of their powers;
   o delivery of training to the CEC staff in charge of external communications to enable it to effectively perform its duties;
   o orienting the CEC operations towards addressing the needs of election stakeholders (in particular, by clarifying legal provisions in the election and referendum laws, establishing a hotline, placing election-related document templates on the CEC website, holding regular briefings for the media, distribution of press-releases on the key events, etc.); and
   o conducting awareness raising and voter education campaigns on electoral issues (in particular through public service announcements, production and distribution of posters, leaflets and other materials aimed to raise public awareness of the elections), as well as ensuring budget funding for such campaigns.

4. Strengthening professionalism of the elections administrators:
   o Institutionalizing the CEC Training Center under the Central Election Commission by approving its Statute;
   o securing funding of the Training Center operations from the state budget; and
   o holding public consultations with stakeholders on the issue of introducing mandatory training and certification of the members of the lower-level election commissions in nation-wide and local elections.

5. Introduction of a long-term and operational planning for the CEC:
   o Approval (after the 2019 national elections) of the strategic plan for the CEC operation for the next seven years (the strategic plan should set the goals, expected
results, indicators to measure the results, evaluation parameters, resources needed to achieve the goals etc.);

- approval of the annual work plans for the CEC’s specific operations based on the strategic plan;
- making public the reports on progress made towards implementing both strategic and operational plans; and
- internal and external audits of CEC operations, as well as needs and risk assessments.

6. Decentralization of the CEC:

- development of proposals and assessments of the need for the establishment of regional branches of the CEC Secretariat to ensure its effective operations at the local level. The tasks of these branches may include, in particular, training of the lower-level election commissions, verification of information on alleged violations of the election laws (including information presented in the complaints lodged with the CEC), providing assistance to election commissions, analysis of the operations of the lower-level commissions related to preparations to the elections, as well as other tasks assigned by the CEC.

7. Improvement of electoral dispute resolution mechanisms:

- Assuming a more active role in detecting violations of the election laws and their investigation (in particular, the CEC should verify information in the complaints it receives on the alleged violations, regardless whether a complaint complies with the formal requirements, provided that complaint contain factual data that can be verified); and
- establishing an internal complaint management system, accessible via the CEC website.

8. Strengthening the CEC role in implementing the election law reforms:

- monitoring the effectiveness of election law reform implementation;
- conducting public consultations on the needs/opportunities/risks related to election law reform implementation;
- Advocating for the needed reforms related to elections.

This publication was developed by the Civil Network OPORA, the Reanimation Package of Reforms (RPR) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) through support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and with assistance of the European Union within the project “Enhancement of Reanimation Package of Reforms Coalition”. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the USAID, the United States Government or the European Union.