



I. Introduction

The Electoral Power of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela organized for years 2008, 2009 and 2010 three events of international character named: Inter-American Meeting of Experts and Representatives of Electoral Bodies of the Member States of the Organization of American States (OAS). The immediate background of these meetings identifies with the agreement reached in the Third Summit of the Americas (2001) of Head of State and Government of the Hemisphere countries. The headwork being “Modernization and Use of the Electoral Technologies in the Hemisphere”, to continue strengthening the electoral mechanisms, using information technologies and communication whenever possible, to effectively guarantee impartiality, transparency, promptness and autonomy of electoral bodies and/or tribunals responsible for organizing, monitoring and verifying elections.

At that moment, exchange of technology and optimal practices were recommended to increase citizen’s participation in the electoral processes, including voter’s training, modernization and simplification of the electoral register and voting and scrutiny procedures, taking into consideration the need for protecting integrity and transparency of the electoral process and promote full participation and incorporation of all the citizens able to exercise their right to vote, without any discrimination.

The issues suggested and later addressed in each of the Meetings held in Caracas, correspond to the new political reality of our countries and are supported in the new constitutional frameworks developed in the last two decades in a big part of the hemisphere, allowing among



other things the development of more inclusive democratic systems intending the transformation of these societies.

Democracy and Participation, are nowadays, interrelated processes where both have to coexist. In this evolution of changes and transformations of our societies and institutions, the electoral authorities and bodies have a role and a basic task to perform. As guarantors of the electoral processes that, in any democracy, are the only ways for such changes to be made in peace and with the highest numerical and qualitative participation of the citizens. In this context, the significance of the vote –literally- is the same throughout all the republican history. It is one of the most direct ways for the people’s sovereignty expression. However, republics change as well as their citizens. Public debates about the State actions and the democratic life, are without doubt more diverse than 15 years ago. The citizen faces the State, its bodies and political parties differently, its requirements are bigger as well as its demands for participation in a more direct way in the decision making in the different instances where it evolves. That new context, that new political culture, demands a change in our way of thinking towards the electoral phenomenon.

Democracy is neither a concept nor a static system. In this sense, our hemisphere shows its dynamism and constant evolution capacity every day, through a restless fight for constructing a world and living conditions higher than those nowadays. Political Systems cannot stop, and the reason is that the citizen’s aspiration to live better is always present. Electoral authorities and bodies are there to guarantee the sovereign voice of our societies be expressed just as our peoples established it in their character of voters. After all, we as electoral authorities have origins in such will of the people and we are committed



to it. Therefore, our main responsibility is to guarantee such will of the people, capable to change the destiny of our societies and institutions, be freely, transparently and promptly expressed with an irrefutable and unquestionably democratic character.

Consequently, the increasing democratic debate does not only claim for the neat and transparent expression of the will of the people every four or five years, but demands the intensification of democracy itself, the decision making instances, not only from the bottom up but horizontally, in innovative ways of social organization and mechanisms of direct participation. In this way, the vote gets a new significance. Changes in the complexity level of the political debate require new mechanisms for public consultation. The election of leaders and representatives is not anymore the most common of the electoral ways. In this sense, electoral bodies have focused our actions to strengthen strategies looking for a more solid and simple electoral system, allowing at the same time multiple ways to make democratic exercise possible.

In consequence, one of the new tasks of the electoral authorities and bodies is the development of inclusion policies of our peoples in full and legitimate exercise of their basic political rights.

To close the historical gap among citizens in quality of voters and registered in the Electoral Register continues being a challenge. In a continent registering relevant figures of participation, this challenge has to be assumed from both the perspective of the individual rights and the recognition of our cultures and ancient peoples. We move towards societies where power and politics are not elite spaces anymore. Power is now a force of the people expressed in places more and more concrete and common. In that direction, we are living times in which an exigent discussion with political parties, institutions and citizenship in



*general has to take place, and understand that our reason of being comes true in the full, universal and including exercise of the vote, as much as local realities demand it. Recognizing that as electoral authorities, we are a tool for making **Politics**.*

*Similarly, it is urgent the need for the increasing participation of the people to become viable, and guaranteeing equality in the access to vote, multiplying each time the number of polling centers and stations. The **management of the centers** is a key factor to ensure the exercise to vote, restricted not only by the exclusion gap of the electoral register, but also by urban segregation, historical product of our development models, pushing poor majorities to the city peripheries where our institutions and the electoral register were not present, and paradoxically, these areas concentrate the most part of the voters in only a few polling centers.*

*In this process of adaptation to the new reality, **the use of the technology at the service of democracy and the fundamental rights of the citizens of our peoples** plays a main role. The transverse issue of these Meetings was that of technology and the paradigm of new societies. In a society more and more familiar with the daily use of any form of technology, it is possible the gradual incorporation of technology to any or all the processes, as in Venezuela, whose voting system is 100% automated. Technology guarantees accuracy in the scrutiny and tally up processes. Nevertheless, technology is not a purpose itself, and it is very important to inform about the role played by the human resource in its establishment. We require the best technology, but especially the best qualified men and women to make that platform operate. Being technology a tool for guaranteeing the integrity of the electoral results.*



*To assume the challenge of modernization of the electoral system is not an easy task, and requires an especial willingness to reach impossibles, to change what traditions kept and, particularly, to abandon resistance to change. It is also required to be opened to dialogues, consensus construction and institutional effort to reinvent us and recreate the political culture of our countries. Therefore, in Venezuela, for example, the automatization process started to leave behind and forever electoral fraud history, for voters to be sure that their willing will be respected. Together with the use of technology we find the **technological transfer** issue, involving transmission of knowledge and processes related to the application of the automated option to the electoral bodies.*

*In this sense, for Venezuela automatization has represented one of the ways to guarantee confidence in the vote, and also very important, it has been a matter of **sovereignty**. On the one hand, to guarantee the democratic exercise of the people's sovereignty, expressed by the vote, and to turn the Electoral Power and its governing body in the unique administrating entity of the electoral process. For any electoral body the dilemma is the same, to ensure in an independent and sovereign manner the quintessential principle of democracy, participation.*

In addition, technology cannot be applied the same way everywhere. It is necessary to stress the particularities of each society, reflected in the legal frameworks and in each electoral system and process. In Venezuela, for instance, regardless the machine is easy to use and its touch screen technology, we still keep the issue of the vote paper, for the voter to verify the option selected. The issue of this paper, characteristic of the manual systems, builds confidence in the voter and the political parties involved.



Meeting of Experts and Representatives of Electoral Organisms of the member-states of the Organization of American States.

Within this context, the National Electoral Council of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela organized the three Inter-American Meetings in April 2008, June 2009 and July 2010. Since the beginning, and shaped by the resolution that originated them, "Modernization and use of the electoral technologies throughout the Hemisphere", a long way has been done that started with the First Meeting, with an acknowledgement of the best practices related from the application of state of the art solutions to a recognition of a variety and particular character of technical knowledge, depending on the cultures and peoples in which they develop.

During the First Meeting, the importance of a continuous improvement of the electoral processes throughout the Hemisphere was highlighted, as a significant contribution for the credibility, transparency, and strengthening of the democratic institutionalism. There was Special emphasis on the fact that automation, within the proper legal context, improves the quality of the electoral process and allows fast results to ensure trust and calm in the political stakeholders and the citizens in general. It was also acknowledged the hi-tech capacity that the countries of the region exhibit in the electoral field, a fact particularly remarkable in the case of Venezuela, and the agreement was to encourage other countries in the hemisphere to move forward in the modernization and use of electoral technology.

During the Second Meeting, it became evident that the electoral organisms and authorities apply common criteria and procedures to all the electoral processes with the purpose of guaranteeing the exercise and inviolability of the vote. It was also certified that there are



guarantees of safety and audits in each one of the stages of the electoral process to ensure trust and transparency, a condition that is reinforced by the participation of the political stakeholders and their diffusion to all the citizens. In that sense, there was particular emphasis in the importance of the construction of a referential framework of optimal procedures for the management and control of electoral processes, whether they are manual or automated, that renders possible the compliance of the criteria that ensure the expression of people's will.

Summarizing, the First and Second Inter-American Meeting of Experts and Representatives of Electoral Organisms held in Caracas, in April 2008 and June 2009, respectively, worked as scenarios for a series of debates on fundamental issues to deepen Latin-American democracies, from the exercise of the vote as one of its substantial processes. There was progress in the systematization of these criteria and optimal procedures that improve the quality in the management and control of the different electoral processes, if we consider that the technical knowledge accumulated by the electoral organisms and authorities of the hemisphere, may be shared and improved, respecting the individual features of the electoral systems, of the peoples, and the cultures in which they take place.

For the Third Meeting, the mandate of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States was to "Compile the common criteria and optimal procedures that the electoral organisms and authorities use to guarantee the management and control of the electoral processes", and for these purposes, the following key processes have been identified:

- 1. Electoral Roll*
- 2. Polling Center Management System*
- 3. Nomination and Ballot Production.*



4. Polling Stations Performance
5. Electoral Funding
6. Capacity Building, Motivation to Participation and Regulation of Electoral Campaigns
7. Suffrage, Count, Totals and Diffusion of Results
8. Transmission of electoral Results
9. Electoral Logistics: Generation and Production of Electoral Instruments;
10. Electoral Logistics: Deployment and Withdrawal of Material and Electoral Equipment.

III. Towards the Construction of a Referential Framework of Common Criteria and Optimal Procedures for the Management and Control of Electoral Processes.

Our political realities are common and so is our essence that is based on solidarity. To share our success and move forward from our errors is the natural consequence of who we are, of our republican background. With this spirit we held the Third Meeting, with the willingness to keep materializing the elements that we set forth as principles from the First Meeting: Horizontal cooperation, the acknowledgement of regional realities, the conviction that the technical knowledge accumulated by our organisms and authorities can be shared, systematized, and improved, and that our hemisphere can count on its own references to guarantee the possibility of auditing our processes. The task we have assumed materializes in a high impact result for our organisms. To compile the common criteria and optimal procedures that we use to guarantee the management and control of electoral processes shall reinforce “a map of joint navigation” to successfully complete this journey: To continue our transformation to comply with the democratic demands of our peoples.

We assume that to compile the common criteria and optimal procedures that the electoral organisms and authorities of the region



use to guarantee the management and control of electoral processes, it is necessary to understand them from their own dynamics and realities, specifically from a perspective of collective construction, of successive approaches, and an integrating and wide vision that encompasses all the strengths and visualize the challenges that the electoral processes of the hemisphere imply, turning that way into a reference framework, and not in a rigid scheme that distorts the nature and value of the experiences and the different efforts that day by day are conducted by the electoral authorities to contribute with efficiency to reinforce the electoral institutionalism and the trust of citizens.

The Third Inter-American meeting ratified the importance of a, open, wide, and honest debate based on the respect and acknowledgement of the different experiences in the management of electoral processes, giving value to the similarities and differences identified by the electoral experts and authorities of the Hemisphere. There was also an agreement to construct, based on the previous arguments, a Referential Framework of Common Criteria and Optimal Procedures that the electoral organisms and authorities use to guarantee the management and control of electoral processes, taking into account the participatory character of democracy, the principles of sovereignty and independence of the states and the respect towards the cultural personality of the peoples in the region.

Taking into consideration the recommendations resulting from the Third Inter-American Meeting of Experts and Representatives of the Electoral Organisms of the Member-States of the Organization of American States, we are currently working in the elaboration of the following compilation: "Approximation to a Referential Framework of Common Criteria and Optimal Procedures that the Electoral Organisms



and Authorities use to Guarantee the Management and Control of Electoral Processes”, for its respective consultation and publication, as it was delegated to the National Electoral Council of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela during the Third Meeting.

In order to comply with timeframes specified in the Conclusions of this Meeting held on the 29th and 30th of July 2010, we do hope to have ready for the first quarter of 2011 the Referential Framework Document and share with our colleagues and public in general, a useful and supportive instrument, not only to compile the theoretical, technical and political knowledge, but also to turn it into a referential comparative document, definitely useful to acknowledge the best practices, common procedures, etc. From this stage on, the possibilities for the exchange and cooperation in any of the key electoral processes shall increase.

As expressed in the Conclusions of this Meeting held on July 29 and 30, we hope to prepare the Reference Framework for the General Assembly in its 41st ordinary period of sessions and for the next Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Authorities, in order to share with our peer and public in general, a useful and supporting instrument, not only to collect the theoretical, technical and political heritage of the electoral authorities, but also to become a reference document that might be useful to identify proper practices, common procedures, etc. Based on the foregoing, any exchange and cooperation possibilities during core electoral process increase.

This report was also a commitment assumed by the National Electoral Council of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in the Third Meeting; we hope this will encourage collective and supporting work by the specialist and representatives of the electoral bodies that participated in the Meetings. The challenge is for all of us to assume the task of developing this Reference Framework as a fundamental input to the electoral heritage of the region and the World.



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