4. Overall findings and recommendations

In sum, the Project contributed considerably to the fulfillment of the new SEC's mandate, that is to the quality of educational activities needed for successful implementation of elections and to the subsequent analysis of the election process involving all the relevant stakeholders in a constructive dialogue.

The challenge for SEC in the upcoming period is to become fully professional. This is primarily dependant on legislative changes, that is on the initiative within Croatian Parliament to make legislative changes needed for initiating appointment of a permanent President of SEC who would not be at the same time president of the Supreme Court. The opportunity to have fully professional SEC for the upcoming local elections is already missed (the elections will be held in May 2009 and any changes should have been made at least a year before the elections in order to come into force). The challenge of countering public perception of the SEC as an institution that “has no reason to exist” in-between elections will remain relevant for some time in the future.

It may be expected that in the future there will be no need for external assistance in terms of financing specific activities for which the SEC, it is assumed, will take care from its own budget. There remains to be seen whether there will be a need for mediating role of an international organization among the domestic actors involved in the election process. Some of the interviewees noted that the key expertise for the Project, including the UNDP Project Management Staff, was offered by Croatian experts and that it should be expected that in future the SEC will be contracting experts from academia and NGOs itself.
There is an interest, however, on behalf of both key partners to continue cooperation established through the Project. The future cooperation may assume different forms. Possible future assistance would be well targeted towards the secretariat since the quality of expert service offered by the SEC's Secretariat will be crucial for the fulfillment of SEC's mandate in future. The following recommendations were devised specifically for the purpose of continuing cooperation between the SEC and UNDP.

There are several specific areas of support which UNDP may consider as appropriate in the upcoming period:

- Training SEC members on presentation skills and training methodology. The SEC members are themselves aware of the need to improve their training skills, since the usual mode of educating lower level election commissions has been primarily through lectures with very limited time left for discussion. While it is expected that the future Secretariat will include staff possessing necessary knowledge on training methodology and presentation skills, it is recommended to include the training for SEC members in their annual planning.

- Continuous education of media. The SEC's mandate includes education on electoral process targeted both at those directly involved in the election implementation and at the public at large. The media, however, would need to be primary target when it comes to education public at large.

- The Manual for Electoral Boards may be of interest to the voters and not only to the voting committees members, the SEC may consider publishing it as a supplement to a daily newspaper (as it is already common practice to publish candidates' lists and voters' instructions in a daily newspaper) or as a separate issue of the Official Gazette.
- The SEC members suggested that it may be appropriate for UNDP to develop a similar project for strengthening SEC's capacity to implement first Croatian elections for the EU Parliament (some political analysts suggest that this would be already at the following EU parliamentary elections, scheduled for June 2009, while more realistic cautious and set the actual date of Croatia's accession at later point).

- Study visits proved to be useful means for knowledge and experience exchange so that it recommended to organize similar visits in the future. Option suggested during field work for this evaluation included shadowing an election commission several days prior to elections. When planning study visits, it would be useful to require participants to prepare individual reports (possibly according to a previously agreed template; questions) since this could potentially enhance learning effects.

- The Study on Electoral Management (version reviewed by the SEC members) need to be distributed to all the relevant stakeholders.

- Almost all of the permanent SEC members had some experience of cooperating with international organizations. This experience, however, seems to be primarily as recipients of technical assistance (e.g. participants in study visit) and less of an active partner (e.g. in developing joint projects). It is recommended that SEC members get acquainted with possibilities of cooperation with international organizations, so that they may take more proactive stance. Alternatively, it is recommended that in hiring support staff, a special care is taken that the staff has experience and knowledge of cooperating with international institutions.

- UNDP facilitated discussions resulting in numerous recommendations aimed at
improving electoral process. It is recommended to establish an appropriate monitoring mechanism of their implementation. E.g. round table on parliamentary elections represented an example of good practice and it has been highly praised by most of the interviewed. It is recommended that SEC, possibly with UNDP's assistance, organizes similar review of the local elections to be held in May 2009. UNDP may need to provide SEC with more detailed insight into the logistics of the seminar held in Opatija (as suggested at the meeting with SEC members).

- It may be useful to situate and assess this project within the overall UNDP's assistance to election processes (or specifically, to permanent election commissions as a form of assistance to institution building) worldwide and to use the assessment for educational purposes of the SEC.

- Although the project documentation suggests that in the course of the project implementation “care will be taken to ensure representation of women in the election procedure and the needs of minorities in the election procedure”, there is no indication that the project paid special attention to gender issues. In future, the SEC may need to seek advice on how to strengthen its capacity to integrate gender issues in its operations (e.g. advice may be sought from the Government's Office on Gender Equality or from the Office of Ombudsperson on Gender Equality).

Annexes

Annex 1: Terms of Reference