



## Moldova 2021 Parliamentary Elections – The role of the Center for Continuous Electoral Training

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Transliteration with Doina Bordeianu and Natalia Iuras, Center for Continuous Electoral Training

**International IDEA message:** Hello listeners, this podcast is hosted by International IDEA. In the next minutes we will help you make sense of what's happening today in democracy worldwide.

**David Towriss:** Hello and welcome to **Peer to Peer**. My name is [David Towriss](#).

**Erik Asplund:** And my name is [Erik Asplund](#).

**David:** And we will be your hosts of this podcast focusing on elections. In this series we will share knowledge, experience, and good practice through our conversations with practitioners.

**Erik:** This afternoon, we will be talking about election training and education in Moldova with Doina Bordeianu, the director of Moldova, Center for Continuous Electoral Training (CICDE), and her predecessor in that role, Natalia Iuras, who is now working as an election consultant. A warm welcome to you both. We are very grateful for the knowledge and experience that you will be bringing into this conversation.



**David:** So, we speak to you fresh from Moldova's parliamentary elections in July and with the additional experience of holding Moldova's 2020 presidential elections under Covid conditions, so, our conversation is certainly timely. So, Natalia, to help us understand voter education and training in Moldova, I think it is important that you take us through Moldova's electoral management structure. Could you give us a very brief overview of the Central Election Commission (CEC), including how responsibilities are allocated within it?

**Natalia Iuras:** Yeah. Thank you very much, David, for the invitation to discuss, first of all, the Center for Continuous Electoral Training, and of course, the evolution and the latest development. But let's start with the CEC where the roots of the CCET lays. So, the year 1989 was marked, if we look back a little bit, by the restructuring and transformation in the Moldovan society, so, the need for profound reforms put forward the rule of law, and of course, the basic for Central Electoral Commission, who at that time was sporadically created for the specific elections and each electoral cycle, then its mandate expired. The setting up of the CEC was influenced by the adoption of the Electoral Code in 1997. By the way, this is the most frequently adopted legislative document in our country. So, the need for a competent and specialized structure in elections was really at the rise, and at that time the CEC was created as a permanent body with the status for organizing and conducting elections.

So, over 24 years now, the permanent activity of the CEC has allowed us to increase the quality and efficiency of the electoral management process. The Commission consists of nine members with a deliberative vote who are elected for a five-year term, and, by the way, these days, the Parliament will elect the new Commission, so, we are really looking forward to seeing who gets into the new Commission. One of the members is appointed by the president of the country, and all the rest eight members are appointed by the Parliament, respecting the majority and the opposition proportionally. So, the CEC is assisted by a staff of 40 people who includes the six directorates, three autonomous services, and one service component part of the CEC Directorate. So, there is a complex structure, and CICDE is part in a way of it, but let us discuss later the CCET structure.

**00:04:30**

**David:** Absolutely, no, that is really helpful to know. So, we have a permanent electoral management body, and within that, or somewhat part of that, is the Center for Continuous Electoral Training, and if it's OK with you, I will refer to it as the Center from now on. So, is the Central Electoral Commission assisted in any way, by a broader temporary workforce?

**Natalia:** It is. Every electoral event, the CEC presents its needs to the government, basically, if it's not planned, electoral events, if it is snap elections. But every planned election has a very rigid, in a way, in another way flexible, structure, and it fits according to the election type. Either it is a parliament election, or it is a local election, so, this stuff expands to the necessity of each electoral event.



**David:** That is really interesting, so, having read your wonderful case study, I've read a little bit about the district electoral councils and the precinct electoral bureaus. Can you just give us an idea of the size of those, let's say, taking the parliamentary elections, roughly, how big are those respective workforces?

**Natalia:** When you were referring to the lower-level CEC members, DEC precinct electoral bureaus and DEC district electoral bureaus. So, the first layer is DEC and usually they, for example, in parliamentary elections, they expand to around, if we have 36 multiplied by 11, around 1,000?

**Doina Bordeianu:** Yeah, maybe if I may jump in here.

**David:** Yes, Doina.

**Doina:** So, yes, for the parliamentary elections, we have a three-layer electoral administration. For the local general election, we have four layers of electoral administration. At the district level, we have around 400 election officials that are appointed 50 days prior to Election Day. When we are talking about the precinct electoral bureaus, they are set up 25 days prior elections and we have around 2,000 PEBs around the country, this means around 20,000 election officials. So, depending on the type of elections, we may have between 20,000 and 25,000 temporary electoral staff to organize and train.

**David:** Goodness, goodness me.

**Natalia:** So, answering your question at the parliamentary elections, we have around 20,000 people. And because they are the most, let's say, *[several inaudible words]* in a way, and presidential is the same events. So, around 20,000 people at the local elections, around 24,000 people.

**Erik:** Thank you. So, if I am hearing you correctly, you have about 20,000 workers who are carrying out operational tasks on Election Day. Doina, how does the Center deliver training for all these poll workers?

**Doina:** So, usually, we use face-to-face training in order to train the temporary staff. We are using interactive and modern approaches and methods that are adapted to the needs of adults. As you may notice, we have a large amount of work to do, so, it would be impossible to be done just with the permanent staff of the training center. So, we are working with contracted trainers that are trained by us in the first place, and then they are delivering training to the DEC members and to the PEB members. So, all the work, coordination work, all the materials are elaborated here at the Center. We are preparing all the teaching materials, participants handbooks, also manuals, everything needed for the training. So, the trainer gets the entire package and delivers the training to the election officials all around the country. This way we are making sure that the information is consistent, and we have uniform training delivered to the stakeholders. Of course, we have, lately with the pandemic, we had to adapt a bit, the training, which was probably done by countries around the world.



**00:10:45**

**Erik:** Yes, so, let me make certain I got this right. You are saying that the Center is doing both face-to-face training and remote training. Would you say that the ratio of remote training has increased due to the pandemic?

**Doina:** Yes, very much. So, before the pandemic, we had a distance learning platform, but we mostly used face-to-face training. Now, with this difficult epidemiological situation, we had to adapt, so, we actually try to benefit from this bad situation, to have more remote training, more digitalized training. So, a part of the training is delivered through our e-learning platform, a part of them are webinars or YouTube video conferences for instance, and part of them remain face-to-face training. I do not know, maybe half, if I should say a proportion between remote and traditional training, I would say probably 50/50 at this moment.

**Erik:** So, one piece of information I was wondering about was if it is a requirement in Moldova to train polling officials. And if it is, I'm assuming, is it codified in the electoral law?

**Doina:** It was at some point, but it did not get implemented. So, now in the electoral code there is no obligation of the election officials to be trained to participate in a training. Still, we have at CICDE, an obligation to ensure the training of the electoral officials, or we have the mandate to deliver specialized training for the election officials.

**Natalia:** To add a little bit on that and to elaborate on the mandatory status of training the electoral officials. So, the CICDE, we did not discuss how exactly CICDE was created. It was created around that legislative amendment. So, in 2011, by the way, this year CICDE celebrates its 10 years mark, so, this is a great opportunity, and we are really happy that this podcast will be released on the anniversary of CICDE. So, in 2011, after a very long deliberation and discussions in society and Parliament, the Parliament adopted the legislative amendments around the specific obligation of CEC through CICDE to train and certify all electoral officials. I was saying that it did not last, it was because the political parties did not have enough internal forces, to nominate a year before elections, so, they mobilized themselves very shortly before elections. That was one of the reasons why it was excluded from the electoral code. However, immediately after, they saw the benefit of trained people in their staff and trained electoral officials, so, it became without a provision in the law. But it became basically mandatory for all the PBs and the DEC's to be trained and later expanded to all the other stakeholders.

**Erik:** If I may, I just have one more question on operational training and it relates to evaluating polling officials. So, I am assuming after training, there is some kind of evaluation, and if there is, could you provide some more details surrounding that and how it's carried about. both for in-person training and for remote training?



**Doina:** Yes, we have a post-test with evaluation questions, for the e-learning platforms, all the courses that are placed on the platform, and with a questionnaire, and if the participant is successful, of course, if it has at least 70 per cent correct answers, the platforms release a certificate of completion of the course. For face-to-face training, we use paper tests. If times allow, and usually this is the rule, to have a pre-test, an initial test, and a final one, so that we can measure, not just the level of knowledge, but also, the increase in this level of their knowledge, and the immediate impact of that training. For the webinars, we are using Google Forms for the tests, of course.

**David:** We have touched on this a little bit already in our discussion of Covid and the difficulties and opportunities of course, that are presented to you as educationists and trainers. But could you think a little more broadly, whichever of you feels more comfortable, I think, perhaps, this one is for you, Doina, but what are some of the challenges that the Center faces in training 20,000 temporary poll workers, and how have these challenges changed from before to after the Covid pandemic?

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**Doina:** There are mainly two major challenges. First one is linked to the short time that we have at our disposal to train all these people, and the second one is linked to the last-minute changes to the electoral framework, and I do not refer necessarily to the electoral code, but mostly to the bylaws adopted by CEC. Of course, the pandemic brought new challenges to us, and I would refer here to the limited number of participants that are allowed to be in the same room, even at some point in the evolution of the situation we were not allowed to organize face-to-face meetings. Also, there are some restrictions linked to the limited interactions between participants and the necessity to keep the social distance.

This takes us to the necessity to have good, big, training rooms, that we do not always have when going around the country in all the localities. So, in the last two years, since the pandemic started, we had to organize, or to contribute to the organization of, two national elections. We had presidential elections last year and we had, this year in July, early parliamentary elections. Also, we had several local or regional elections to be organized. So, as I was saying, we tried to move to digital learning, let's say, we improve *[inaudible]* E-learning platform. Now it is more accessible, more user friendly, also we try to move on and to use a lot, the Zoom platform. So, we tried to, because the distance learning has its own limitations, but we do not want to cut from the interaction during the training so, we had to study a lot to see what are the available online tools that allows you to keep the interaction between participants. And we are using breakout rooms on the Zoom platform to work in small groups on some tasks. We have some other tools as Padlet, for instance, to have a collaborative work during the webinars. So, we are trying to keep the same quality that we have used for our beneficiaries already in our training. We try to keep the same quality on the remote training also.

What is also the benefit that we had during this period is that we implemented the blended training in several stages, and now we do not have just one training for each electoral management body and lower-level electoral management bodies. But we are training them through several trainings, both face-to-face and distance. For instance, we have for PEBs, just after their appointment, we have a video conference



with them, a live video conference, where we explain to them what they have to do during their first meeting. In Moldova, the first meeting of the electoral administration's lower-level body is very important because they elect their management and they establish all the tasks that they have to perform during the election period, and so on. Then we are coming with face-to-face training in each district and then just before election we have a short refresher training for them on the E-Day procedures, on the tabulation and packing, on these immediate post E-Day procedures.

**David:** And just, very briefly, if you will, Doina, just to give us an idea, what is the level of experience that these PEBs, that these temporary poll workers, have before they begin their training with you for a particular event. Do any of them have previous experience, and if so, roughly, what percentage would you say?

**Doina:** So, especially if two electoral events are close to each other, we have bigger chances that the same persons would work as the election officials. As we had this year, when between the presidential elections and the parliamentary elections, we had just eight months, probably around 80 per cent were the same. But otherwise, I would say that also, depending on the composition of Parliament, which is directly linked with the composition of the lower-level management bodies, we would have between 30 and 60 per cent of staff with experience. Still, we have to bear in mind that the education of the background of the election officials is very diverse. We do not have, for the PEB level, for the precinct electoral bureaus, we do not have any requirements about education background. So, yes, the work experience and education experience is very diverse.

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**David:** Really interesting to hear. Thank you. Thank you, Doina. This one is for you, Natalia, if that is okay. I am interested in knowing, does the training center training mandate extend to permanent employees as well as the temporary workforce?

**Natalia:** Yeah, CICDE training mandate starts with permanent employees of the CEC members and staff so, before CICDE, the CEC had no orientation packages that would introduce the newly employed staff, all the interns, by the way, to the main activities and organization procedures, right, relevant for a smooth organization of elections, so, as a result, even in 2014 they introduced an orientation course for all staff, and the most eminent training platform served as available training resources, by the way at that time was BRIDGE, who is still one of the most popular, I think among the CICDE beneficiaries. So, apart from a training center for BRIDGE-training, CICDE provides also ongoing orientational training to the CEC members and staff so, to DC and PB members as well, using, as Doina mentioned, adult based teaching methodology.

So, most CEC members and staff are trained in different topics in accordance with their needs and specialization, for example, financial operation, procurement, communication, training of trainers. And by the way, this is another subject, it probably could be also developed a little bit because the delivery of



CICDE training programs would not be possible without the performance and professionalism of the trainers, so, CICDE conducts this regularly. The training of trainers in a cascade-also manner, so, the CEC searches trainers foremost within the CEC and CICDE. And if it is not sufficient, the number of these trainers, then all the other recruitment techniques are applied, so, this is how teachers, librarians, some civil society organization representatives, or students even, can apply to be trainers within CICDE.

**Erik:** Natalia, you were mentioning various stakeholders there, and what would be also interesting for me to know and our audience, I assume, is that training goes beyond, you know, the permanent workforce, as you mentioned, also does temporary work, for us. The Center also provides training to society organisations and political parties. It would be really interesting to hear some more on that aspect of the Center's mandate.

**Natalia:** Well, acknowledging the value of diversity in elections and in politics, in the end, CICDE, in a more normative way, provides civil society, as you mentioned, because we are all civil society representatives, and any other electoral stakeholder training and education campaign and informational campaign. So, to better understand their needs, CICDE conduct training needs analysis, or assessment as we say, and there were training plans for each category of the stakeholders and specified groups such as journalists, local public authorities, police force, political party representatives, pupils, librarians. This is one of the training programs that or civic education program that, Doina, you could mention later, to university students. International observers or local observers also are part of this package, and they expand every year. This is what impresses me every time I read the CICDEs reports because it never stops. So, you can train anything that moves right going on. This is how, we usually say, that it is important to find a group and then the training will be adapted and adjusted accordingly to their needs.

**Erik:** Natalia, you mentioned students, and I know that the Center has developed a master's degree on political and electoral management with the State University of Moldova. Could you say maybe something more about this degree? Its design and objectives? Feel free to comment, Doina.

**Natalia:** Yeah, well as CICDE became a significant civic education partner to a large-scale educational campaign. So, one of them, in 2015, was marked by the creation of the master program, political and electoral management, a joint effort of CICDE with the State University of Moldova. This is the international relation, political, and administrative science faculty. So, the two-year program was designed for people with a strong civic education position who are looking to deepen their knowledge in the electoral field and practice specifically. And today we are proud to see that the alumni of these programs are present in most of the craft state structures such as Parliament, the CEC management. Soon we will see that the new composition that were students of our programs, local government level, also, they are present there, and civil society. So, we are proud that the main objective of creating and educating a new generation of leaders is regularly achieved through this program.

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**David:** That's really interesting, so, this is a program that is not just feeding the electoral management board. You have a vast range of state stakeholders who are all benefiting from a deeper, formalized educational training that is focused on elections.

**Natalia:** I would say this is a more scientifically level, and I think Doina can elaborate a little bit about it because this is one of her main babies I would say, that she is developing now on a deeper level.

**Doina:** Yes, so, now will be the 4th generation of the students at this master's program. The subjects are quite balanced between electoral, and the elections, and the politics, so, the students are also either interested in elections or politics and they can find any answers here. If we are talking about, because our master program is part of our research direction of activity, so, we are trying now to develop more in these directions and to provide the decision makers some studies, some policy briefs, that would help to improve the operations and the electoral legislative framework. We have, I would say, I think it's good to be mentioned here, we launched several years ago, a program of small scholarships for research for master students and doctoral schools so, each year we give this award, five scholarships, to the students in order for them to research a topic linked to the electoral field. And then they have the opportunity to present their work at a public scientific conference at the end of the year. Now we have first-year students, their background, as I said, is very diverse. We have people that graduated from technical universities and came to this master program to better understand the mechanism of politics and of the elections.

**Erik:** Doina, I know for a fact that there are not that many countries in the world that provide this kind of master program, especially on electoral administration, so, I think Moldova is one of a few. I know in France they have a program on electoral administration. I know Scala Santa Ana in Italy is also providing an online version of it called Mapa. But it is quite significant in the ways you described of how this is a way of professionalizing electoral administration, right?

I have another question, Doina. Now we had a really good conversation with Pilar Biggio the other day, she, by the way, is also an electoral trainer and educator, but from Peru. And she spoke of the importance of voter education and the imperative of delivering voter education that includes a civic education aspect, for example, educating citizens on the importance of voting or engaging in elections in other ways - are these sentiments that you also agree with?

**Doina:** Actually, I probably can talk for hours about the importance of electoral and civic education. We have an entire philosophy on this topic. We are seeing that democracy can be learned and actually this is our unique selling proposition. We started to focus more on civic education, since 2015, and now we have educational programs for all levels of schooling. In 2020, just before the pandemic started here in Moldova, we piloted a program for kindergartens on civic education, and it was really good perceived by children, and we will definitely continue with this after we go back to normality. And we have access to the kindergarten again. We have electoral comics with a hedgehog, Arci, in the main row. We have board games; we have intellectual games for more grown-up students or people. We have training in organizing elections in the student consoles in the high schools and gymnasiums. We have contests, different kinds





of contests; essay contests, or electronic logging contest, more than this. So, and Natalia mentioned also about librarians several times, what we are doing now, we are trying to use the existing networks in order to cover more people with our educational problem. These kinds of existing networks are the libraries and are the schools for the moment.

Now we are working, in the coming days will be launched publicly, a study on the necessity of enhancing electoral education in schools. So, in our schools at the moment we have a subject named 'education for society' that have a small component on elections and on electoral education. What we are trying to do with the help and the support of the unity of our partners, we are trying to develop a curriculum for optional subjects in schools, specifically on electoral education. So, we are doing a lot, but of course it can be done more than this, and we are willing to do more than this, and we are very happy to have the support of our partners in this, in our desire to be helpful and to contribute to the raising of the electoral culture of the country, of the population.

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**David:** This is to me is fascinating and Moldova as I read all about it, looking at the Center's website and read about all of these programs. I'm so impressed and I am interested in what partners you have in developing these programs. Who are you working with?

**Doina:** We have a partnership, agreement even, with the Ministry of Education. *[several inaudible words]* So, during our research on the topic, because first we release a study, and then we will start working on the curriculum. We had meetings with the representative of the Ministry of Education to see what is their opinion. So, we have meetings, actually, with all the relevant stakeholders, to see how they envisage this curriculum, this new subject. And also, with the Ministry of Education, of course, we are discussing, and we are using this partnership that we have with them in order to organize to help children to organize elections in school councils, as I said. All the activities that are done in schools or with schools have to be firstly agreed with the Ministry of Education, so, we are trying to have a good dialogue with the Ministry.

**Natalia:** But that also translates to all the other state organizations. For example, National Institute of Justice, when it comes to judges, CICDE has an agreement with them. So, it's a partnership that they provide, for example, the space for the training or, yeah, sometimes even the trainer, in combination with the trainers from CICDE. So, it is every I think most of the trainings are in partnership with the local partners as well.

**Erik:** Thank you, thank you both. I think we are running out of time, but I think it is, or would be, interesting for our listeners, I think it was already mentioned by you, David, that there is a case study on Moldova and the training center written by Natalia, and Doina, I know you were also involved so, and it is available on International IDEA's website. And so, with that I just want to thank both of you very much for taking part in this discussion, I have definitely learned a lot.



**David:** Absolutely, and it is wonderful to hear this exciting work that you have been doing in in Moldova, and great for our listeners to hear about it, and hopefully read more.

**Natalia:** Thank you very much for the invitation. It was really interesting to talk to you as well. Thank you.

**Erik:** So, that is it for today. For any suggestions or recommendations, feel free to email us at [elections\(@\)idea.int](mailto:elections(@)idea.int). My name is Erik Asplund.

**David:** And my name is David Towriss. Thanks for listening.

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*This transcript has been lightly edited to enhance readability and clarity without changing the sense of the points made by the discussants.*