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[Home](#) > Authorities in Charge of the Elections in 50 countries address the Challenges of the “Digital Democracy” via Media and the Voting Electronic Tools

[A](#) [1] [A](#) [1]

Authorities in Charge of the Elections in 50 countries address the Challenges of the “Digital Democracy” via Media and the Voting Electronic Tools

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The first officials of the instances in charge of the electoral processes in more than fifty countries were reunited, from 28th and 31st May, in Troia town (a large suburb of Lisbon, the Portuguese capital) in order to analyze and anticipate the future challenges posed by the digital media and electronic technologies to the electoral processes, from the list management and the registrations until the vote and the announcement of results.

This expert symposium, gathering government officials, researchers, promoters, providers of electronic tools and electoral operations management systems, media managers and the major social networks (including Facebook), was organized at the initiative of the International Center for Parliamentary Studies (ICPS), in association with the national commission of elections in Portugal, which gathered over 150 participants, including representatives of the HACA, the Director General Mr. Jamal Eddine Naji, and Mr. Mehdi Idrissi Aroussi, Legal Department Director, as well as many delegations comprising speakers and panelists from Palestine, Jordan, Tunisia, Canada, the US, Lithuania, Bangladesh, Cape Verde, Senegal, Mauritius, Madagascar, the United Kingdom, Maldives, Spain, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Italy, Korea, New Zealand, Albania, Lithuania, Hungary, Georgia, Argentina, Mali, Germany and Portugal.

Both analyses, in terms of legislations, institutional systems and/or administrative levels in charge of the elections, their control or regulation (including that of media and social networks) and the contextualized presentations on experiences regarding this “digital democracy”, in many countries from all continents, emphasized the main challenges that are politically, socially and technically complex hindering not only the implementation of a transparent and consequent voting process, but also the citizen participation, especially that of young people and women. In fact, most of the presentations highlighted the decisive importance of raising awareness among people and mobilizing them for the democratic participation, particularly the youngest from 16 to 18 years old, which is the generation of the quasi-hegemonic digital era, nowadays and in the future, and also the reflections, usages and behaviors in the city life. A life that can only be perceived as totally dematerialized, especially regarding all operations of expression and implementation of democracy, and mainly its pedestal: the vote.

The ineluctability of the dematerialization’s sustained development, all over the world, of the new electors’ generations both in the present and the future, values more than ever the importance of media literacy concerning the major challenges of media impact on public opinions and their influence

on making opinions and therefore the future of the democratization process integrity. On this regard, the pertinence of the media regulators role should be highlighted on the level of campaign monitoring, coverage of electoral processes and events, promotion, participation and media literacy as on the level of promotion, participation and representation of women, and persons with special needs, on all “digital democracy” registers. A democracy that defeats as well, in terms of elections integrity, the unknown threats of the times before the digital era: “fake news”, the impact of the “intruding and/or manipulator campaigns via social media, cyber-rebellion against the democratic choice of voting, the governments temptation to lock the spaces of expression and animation of the democratic debate, under the pretext, just but not always right, of these potential threats that are technically out of control etc.

One of the most noticed interventions during this symposium was that of Mr. Pierre Kingsley “Chief Electoral Officer” in Canada (from 1990 to 2007, unanimously named by the parliament, as asked and rewarded), which demonstrates the huge, subtle and nearly present extend in all democracies, whether it is new or old, of the concomitance between the politics (or the politician) and the money. This almost incestuous relation, destructive anyways, more or less, of the integrity of the democratic processes, elections first, is for the large part, responsible for the regression of democracy in more than 25 cities since the beginning of the 90s, as highlighted by Mr. Richard Soudriette, skilled president of the International Foundation of Elections Systems (IFES) who directed the activities of this symposium. A symposium, the 16th organized by the ICPS (after the 15th that was organized in Jordan and to which participated the HACA represented by Mr. Aroussi), that also emphasized the important roles of justice, political parties, civil society, and the promoter activists of democracy in media and its regulators, in terms of independent, impartial and pluralist information as well as raising awareness and promoting active participation in the representative democracy brought by the electoral process.

Links

[1] <https://www.haca.ma/en/javascript%3A%3B>