

## AFRICA & NEAR EAST

# THE REWARDS OF TRUST

by Lazhar Aloui

In its 15 years of electoral assistance around the world, IFES has often been called upon to respond to short-term needs, usually in direct connection with single electoral events. While that type of assistance is necessary, a long-term commitment to an electoral system and its operational environment is often the only way to achieve lasting change in a country's norms and practice of governance. Such a long-term approach allows for local ownership of the reforms, fosters receptivity and transparency among local partners, facilitates cross-sector viability and leads to better understanding of the fluctuations of an often non-linear development process.

Yemen offers an interesting case in point, where perceived constraints have often masked valuable opportunities for change—and where IFES has been able to respond to these opportunities by first building solid and broad-based partnerships. IFES involvement in Yemen dates back to 1993. A series of projects during discrete electoral events led to a national colloquium on the electoral system in 1997. By the time it opened its field office there in 1999, IFES was widely recognized as a serious and competent partner in planning and designing key elements of the Yemeni electoral process. IFES has worked since then in close partnership with the Yemeni Supreme Commission for Elections and Referenda (SCER) on a range of institutional and operational issues.

The sustained quality of IFES' work proved crucial in winning the trust and acceptance of Yemeni election administrators despite potential impediments to the formation of a true partnership. For that to happen in a society that is open but not readily transparent, and in a region where there is a

growing distrust of American institutions, is a valuable achievement.

The hard-won opportunity to observe the intricate decision-making process that has shaped Yemen's electoral system has given IFES a major advantage in affecting cross-sector change. Yemeni political parties and civil society organizations have demonstrated strong stakeholder interest and participation in the process. In the course of debating contested issues, IFES has been called upon primarily to advise on technical matters, but also to play a crucial role in bringing the SCER together with opposition and governing parties to discuss alternative solutions, codes of ethics and ways to engage the public. Proactive coordination with local and international actors has also proven to be essential to instill the practice of inclusive dialogue.



Dr. Abubaker Al-Quirbi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yemen, visited the IFES headquarters in Washington, DC on May 30, 2002 to discuss cooperation with IFES in preparation for the Yemeni parliamentary elections, scheduled for April 2003.

The efficient, impartial and transparent administration of any electoral process hinges upon the level of

institutional development, experience in the practice of democracy, and public confidence in a particular system of government. To their credit, donors and development practitioners increasingly have striven for achievable and sustainable results despite the constraints of short funding cycles, competing development opportunities and changing political priorities. What is needed, however, is an added effort to articulate and advocate for sustained and integrated development strategies that focus on results while recognizing the relevance of process.

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January: Yugoslav Federation broken up.



February: Bush and Yeltsin proclaim formal end to Cold War.

April: U.S. recognizes three former Yugoslav republics.

November: Czechoslovak Parliament approves separation into two nations.

## 1992

IFES receives grant from the Pew Charitable Trust for civic education and teacher training in Estonia. The grant is renewed in 1993 and 1994.



IFES conducts voter education in hard-to-reach rural areas of Angola ahead of September 1992 elections and organizes international election observer delegation.



IFES establishes its first field office in Central and Eastern Europe, in Bucharest, Romania, for the 1992 elections. The office remains active through 1995.