

The Role of Political Parties in Enhancing Political Activity of the Electorate

Tashkent, 30 September 2009 - intervention by J.D. Blaauw

Earlier contributions to this International Roundtable have been in a broader context and sometimes of a rather abstract level. I want to go more down to earth and talk about the run up to elections and in particular the organisation of the campaign and related items. Of course much of this will sound familiar.

Shortly after the local elections in 2006, the party branch in the municipality where I live took the decision to start up a continuing campaign leading to the next local elections in 2010.

For every year between 2006 and 2010 a survey was made about possible public events in the three centres of the municipality which was formed by merging three villages, each of which has a different character. The criterion for participation was whether it would be beneficial to be visually present as a political party with a market-type stall and roaming teams among the public to start discussions and hand out special leaflets. Events range from Christmas, Easter and other special markets, sailing contests, festivals featuring marching fanfare bands, public barbeques and bulb-flower shows (the municipality is situated in the renowned bulb-growing area). For Christmas we decorated our own Christmas tree in which people could place cards with written complaints about the way the municipality is run, but also wishes and ideas for a better future. We always collected these cards and used them as a means of gathering information on what was seen as important by the public. We have used that information to prompt our party representatives in the city council act upon them, but also for our long term programme. At Christmas we even had our own Santa Claus in the street, and at Easter a couple of Easter bunnies!

The local press and TV-station were regularly informed in advance about our activities and also about the results. We implemented a more active ICT policy. The website was modernised and updated weekly by the webmaster. Connections were made with Facebook, Hyves and Twitter and some of our active local politicians started a Blog.

In January 2009 more decisions were to be made, some of them spurred by main party rules and obligations.

- A selection committee was formed to interview sitting aldermen and councillors and prospective new candidates. A broad appeal was made among party members to come forward, and active talent spotting was carried out.
- A survey was carried out about the spread of the votes in 2006 in the different polling stations, the personal votes of each party candidate in the polling stations, and the effect of list-voting.
- An election programme committee was formed to draft an election programme platform paper.

- Our own electronic newsmagazine was created in conjunction with the website. This magazine contains messages from the Chairman, contributions from the Floorleader and those Councillors who took the floor in council meetings, Aldermen explaining their activities, information for and from party members, results from the questionnaire carried out by the webmaster on the website.
- The commitment was made to join all possible regional party meetings.
- Talks with adjacent party branches were opened for coordination and mutual support.
- A dialogue was started with the main party office to prevent repetition of earlier mistakes and to prevent confusing slogans and damaging discussions.
- The question of legitimate fundraising was taken on board and separate approaches were started.
- All possible candidates were sent to the various training courses of the party and a special temporary political academy was established to train candidates on local issues.
- An agenda was set up with the dates of general sessions with the members for the adoption of the platform paper as well as the final list of 30 candidates, the discussion meetings with other political parties, invitations for prominent party politicians and the actual start of the campaign.

I should like to elaborate on two of the above-mentioned items.

Selection committee

The number one candidate on the voting list is separately appointed during a general session of the members. The selection committee interviews the possible candidates individually. An alphabetical list of candidates is published. After the interviews the selection committee will make a list proposal for the local party bureau. The list will be made in order to comply with the following criteria:

- Quality and capacity
- Gender
- Diversity
- Age spread
- Local connection (3 villages!)

The list may be amended by the party bureau, but only when driven by proper arguments, and then sent to all the members for a final decision in a general meeting. The general session can change the order of the list, but cannot add new names.

Election programme committee

The following subjects, relevant to our particular municipality, needed to be considered by the programme committee:

- Responsible financial policy, no local tax increases, lowest rates for community services, for example rubbish collection, etc.
- The town hall needs to operate efficiently and must be open for the public to address civil servants and councillors
- High priority for infrastructure
- The public wants a safe and secure living environment
- The municipality must be green and clean
- A positive approach to, and environment for, entrepreneurs
- Attention need to be paid to recreation and tourism
- Community welfare is a priority
- Youth and care
- Housing

Thank you all for your attention.