

The following note is regarding the voting process for the election of a new co-coordinator to replace Vittorio Bertola, whose term will expire with this election.

Since there has been some controversy on this issue, I will present the matter in some detail here.

IGC's charter's provisions regarding the voting process

I quote the full section of the charter on the voting process.

Voting Process

Each person who is subscribed to the list at least two (2) months before the election will be given a voter account.

As part of the voting process the voter must personally ascertain that they are a member of the IGC based on membership criteria described elsewhere in this charter and posted as part of the voting information (i.e. a voter must affirm membership on the voter form in order to vote). The decision to self-identify as a member of the IGC is a personal decision based on the criteria defined. A list of the self-defined member-voters will be published after the election with the results of the election.

Elections will be run by the coordinators and will be subject to the appeals process.

All voting will be open, though at the discretion of the coordinators, with or without a specific request from member(s), any vote can be made into a secret vote. The reasons for making it a secret vote will be stated, and are subject to appeal.

(quote ends)

The two key things mentioned in this section that are most relevant to our discussions here are.

1. Each person who is subscribed to the list at least two (2) months before the election will be given a voter account.
2. As part of the voting process the voter must personally ascertain/ affirm that they are a member of the IGC, based on membership criteria described elsewhere in this charter (To quote the charter's section on membership, "The members of the IGC are individuals, acting in personal capacity, who subscribe to the charter of the caucus").

The charter *does not* lay out a voting process in full detail. It is left to the person who organizes the election process (as per the charter the co-coordinator who is

“not up for election”), which is of course “subject to appeal by the appeal team”.

Accordingly, the person in-charge has to devise a voting process which takes into account key parameters laid down in the charter, along with commonly accepted parameters of fairness, transparency etc, within the possible ‘technical means’ that are available. The person will also obviously have to keep in mind practical considerations of effectiveness, ease of voting, possibilities of bottlenecks, issues of process clarity to voters and such things.

The voting process that was proposed

I took the two above listed requirements of the charter – each mailing list participant gets a voter account, and before voting one has to affirm membership through subscription to the charter - as central to organizing the voting process.

The first requirement was interpreted by me to mean that the voting process should *start with* giving every mailing list participant the opportunity to cast a vote. The second condition, on the other hand, required a clear process of ensuring that only those who accept membership by explicitly subscribing to the charter are allowed to vote. Both were seen as important parameters to ensure for any voting process that may be used.

The obvious question at this stage that may come up is – why did I not simply adopt the voting process used in the last election for co-coordinators. I did not do it because in my opinion that process was not as per the charter’s requirements. It did not ascertain from the potential voters “that they are a member of the IGC based on membership criteria” (which is subscription to the charter).

We are a set of volunteers steering somewhat complex organizational processes, and I do not mention the fault with the last election process for any other reason than to justify – in face of some sustained criticism of the present process – why I chose to do it differently – do it in a manner, which, in my opinion, is far more consistent with the charter. (Apart from violation of the charter. more importantly, the earlier process is also directly associated with the situation, and the viewpoint, of not having a standing list of IGC members which leads to serious organizational problems, which I will discuss in another note.)

I started the voting process by taking into account the full 2 month old IGC mailing list, as per the charter’s requirement. I personally wrote to each person on the mailing list with a view to “ascertain that they are a member of the IGC based on membership criteria” (which is of subscribing to the charter) mentioning that that this is a required condition for voting as per the charter. I do not understand how seeking adherence to this important requirement of the charter constitutes a violation of the first requirement – of giving voter account to all, when every single list participant was given an opportunity, as a part of the voting

process, to affirm membership. The next step of the voting process would have been of giving a ballot to all those who affirmed IGC membership as per the charter's requirement.

I consider this voting process as fulfilling both the requirements of the charter - of giving everyone on the mailing list a voter account, and ascertaining membership before voting, in the best possible manner, given the technical means available for organizing the voting process. I was proceeding within the possibilities of email text based processes used in the previous elections.

A likely question at this stage can be – why did I not do it in a single step, meaning, seek affirmation of membership as per the charter's condition on the ballot itself, and simply reject votes that did not fulfill the condition of membership affirmation. I did consider this possibility, but, as I mentioned, the only voting technique I was considering was an email text based process we used the last time. I know (and this has been confirmed with my experience of manually ascertaining membership) that trying a text based - 'do confirm that you subscribe to the charter and accept membership' - qualifying process for voting on the ballot itself, where responses had also to be put in text, would have landed me with a lot of votes which would have had to be considered invalid even when the real intention of the mailing list participant may have been to accept membership. List participants would have written unclear responses, and many would have just not responded to the 'membership/ charter affirmation' part and proceeded with voting. In the middle of a voting process it is not possible to revert back with request for clarifications. In any case the ballot goes into an anonymous dump, since it is a secret vote, and there is no way to do the kind of (often repeated) clarifications that I have been doing to mailing list participants in the present process. Some list participants, for instance, needed to be re-clarified on the difference between list subscription and charter subscription. I do not believe that the important, and organizationally central, act of accepting/ affirming membership should be done in such unclear circumstances. In accepting IGC membership one should know with some amount of clarity what one is accepting. In my view, this goes with taking the caucus and its membership seriously.

I therefore rejected an email-text based single-step process as impractical, since it would have led to a massive miscarriage of the voting process. I stand by my judgment. In any case, I was not convinced that there was any real substantive difference between accepting/ affirming membership 5 days before the instant of voting rather than 5 seconds before. It is, in my view, the same thing. The single-step process was likely to cause too many and much bigger problems than the 'problem', if one is inclined to see it as so, associated with manually ascertaining membership , done as a part of the declared voting process, albeit a couple of days before the actual vote is cast. And in my opinion it violated no part of the charter.

The voting process that was being used causes no exclusion or disenfranchisement at all, since every single list participant was approached (repeatedly) and provided with the opportunity to vote, within the constraints of the conditions laid by the charter, nor does it in any way violate the charter – allegations which have been made by some on the IGC list.

In this context, it is also worthwhile to note that the real opposition to the present voting process came from those who have issues with having to specify that they subscribe to the charter at any time at all, and not just with regard to the present voting process. However, as per the charter there is no way around this. To vote one must specifically affirm membership and the acceptance of the charter. This is a clear requirement of the charter.

The new proposal for the voting process

While, as argued, I have no doubt that the voting process that had been proposed and initiated, in terms of giving voter account to all and affirming membership, is completely in keeping with the charter, and the best one for upholding the requirements of the charter in the conditions it was proposed, I do have a new proposal which can help us go forward in a smoother manner.

Since about two weeks ago I have access to the technical possibility, in an environment which I consider and secure and trustworthy, which can enable us to do membership/ charter affirmation and actual voting immediately one after the other over a web based system. The process will of course still require a clear affirmation of membership and subscription to the charter before one can vote, which condition is expressly laid down by the charter. The same two steps proposed to be done manually earlier can be done immediately one after the other on a website. I am considering using this process. We are still testing it and I will be able to finalize it early next week. Accordingly, I will propose the new method, if found working fine. Meanwhile if anyone has comments on or objections to using such a web-based process please do state them right away.

The IGC membership list which has recently been prepared by us remains the standing IGC's members list. While everyone is strongly encouraged to vote, one does not lose membership by not voting. On the other hand, any non-member list participant who affirms membership using the new proposed web-based system will be added to the members list.

Closely connected to the voting process issue are some important issues regarding having a standing IGC members list, which I will take up in another note. In fact, I have no doubt that the real issue behind differences concerning ‘technicalities’ of the voting process is of some difference of views about the nature and meaning of IGC’s membership. It is best to discuss the membership issue openly and thoroughly, *inter alia* examining the charter’s provisions on this matter, and clearly establish IGC’s view on it. If the ‘membership issue’ is sorted

out, in my view, technical issues of using one voting process or the other would not remain significant. It is my view that the *real* opposition to the present voting process stems almost entirely from, or at least entirely has its roots in, opposition to making and keeping a standing IGC members list, through direct ascertaining of subscription to the charter and acceptance of membership from the IGC mailing list participants.