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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 19 - 30 September 2016

Working session 1: Democratic institutions, including address by the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Madam/Mr. Moderator,

I am honoured to present a statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The EU attaches great importance to the promotion of strong democratic institutions, and in particular to the promotion of inclusive, transparent and credible elections and of democracy at the national, regional and local level. We are convinced that sustainable democracy is not possible without the protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights, as well as ensuring a safe and enabling environment for civil society.

Let me recall the UN General Assembly Resolution of 17 December 2015 (70/168) on genuine elections and the promotion of democratization stressing that peace, human rights, the rule of law, democracy and good governance, including the holding of free and fair elections, are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

As we mark ODIHR's 25th anniversary, we also look back to the fundamental principles and commitments this institution is guardian to, notably those enshrined in the Charter of Paris 1990: "Democratic government is based on the will of the people, expressed regularly through free and fair elections. Democracy has as its foundation respect for the human person and the rule of law".

Madam/Mr. Moderator,

We call on all participating States to continue their efforts in strengthening institutional transparency and inclusiveness, particularly when it comes to participation of women, youth,



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minorities and other vulnerable groups in public life, as well as to promotion and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Our recommendations in relation to this session are the following:

- Participating States should take all appropriate measures to ensure the right of citizens to political participation, in a free and fair climate without undue restrictions imposed by the administration, violence, intimidation or fear of retribution, against voters, candidates, parties and elected representatives, both in the run-up to and beyond the elections. We highlight the importance of enhancing the political participation of women, in particular in terms of being eligible to publicly elected bodies on equal terms with men.
- Participating States should ensure transparent, inclusive, pluralist and competitive elections that provide the electorate with a genuine choice on the basis of a level playing field and an informed vote.
- We encourage participating states to extend early and unrestricted invitations to ODIHR to observe WITHOUT CONSTRAINTS their elections in line with OSCE commitments.
- We acknowledge the crucial role of ODIHR in building public confidence in the governance processes and thus strengthening democratic societies and accountable and representative institutions across the OSCE area, especially through its dedicated work in providing electoral assistance and deploying election observation missions.
- Therefore we encourage participating states to get involved in follow-up activities to Election Observation Missions' recommendations in cooperation with ODIHR, including by making voluntary reports to the OSCE Human Dimension Committee in line with EU's Action Plan on democracy and human rights 2015-2019.
- We also encourage the participating States to consider seconding more observers and/or consider other possible ways of engagement, such as contributing to ODIHR's Observation Sustainability Fund.



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Madam/Mr. Moderator,

Let me reiterate EU's full support to ODIHR's mandate, as well as its needs-based methodology ensuring an independent and impartial observation and post-election follow-up and assisting participating States in complying with their commitments, i.e. through legislation reviews, and election observation handbooks. It is us, the participating States, who endowed ODIHR with this mandate and its implementation also depends on our determination to respect our commitments.

I would like to highlight that ODIHR's methodology, endorsed in Ministerial Council Decision 19/06, has also inspired other organisations, among them the EU, in designing their election observation missions contributing to democratization and peace building efforts within and beyond the OSCE region. Similarly to ODIHR, the EU supports and is committed to the implementation of the Declaration of Principles (DoP) for International Election Observation as also recently reconfirmed in the EU Action Plan on democracy and human rights. We encourage all other organisations involved in international election observation to subscribe to these principles.

The EU would like also to emphasize the role of civil society and NGOs in observation of the election process and compliance of participating States with their commitments.

We would like to reaffirm that ODIHR's impartial assessment reports and recommendations stemming from its election observation missions are a very important contribution, taken very seriously by the EU Member States, striving to further strengthen their own democratic institutions and electoral processes. We believe that only by acknowledging and working on our own shortcomings are we credible to others. Our commitment to closely cooperating with the OSCE/ODIHR and ensuring effective implementation of their recommendations, as well as of the reports of other election observation bodies, is reflected in the EU's Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

Thank you.



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The Candidate Countries TURKEY, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.