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Strengthening the equality of women and men is a challenge to many participating States in the OSCE region, including Liechtenstein. Despite having implemented a range of legal and other measures in order to promote equality in recent decades and years, we had to experience that there is no guarantee of a continuing positive trend. In the parliamentary elections in February 2017, the share of female members of parliament fell from 20 to 12 per cent, the lowest since 2001. While the discussions on the reasons behind this result and possible measures are ongoing, there is consensus among parties that more must be done in order to promote female participation in politics. With regard to the communal elections at the beginning of 2019, new awareness-raising activities are planned.

Liechtenstein addresses the challenge of gender equality in line with the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, supported by a recent reorganisation regarding equality of opportunity. In December 2016, an independent national human rights institution was founded by several non-governmental organisations on the basis of a law that was passed by the Liechtenstein parliament in June 2016. According to the law, the Liechtenstein Association for Human Rights carries out a variety of tasks. This includes a broad mandate to promote the protection of human rights and advise authorities, to support victims of human rights violations, and to carry out investigations. The offices of the Association for Human Rights have become operational in the first half of this year, and the association is currently working on its priorities for the next years. The promotion of gender equality will be one of the main working areas of the association.

Besides this important reorganisation, Liechtenstein has strengthened its efforts in combating domestic violence against women and children in recent years. In a revision of the criminal code, the list of offences that are prosecuted *ex officio* was expanded to include dangerous threats against close family members, stalking, and rape or sexual assault in marriages

and domestic partnerships. This ensures that prosecution of these offences is no longer tied to any limiting preconditions regardless of the will of the presumed victim. Accordingly, the rights of victims were strengthened by revisions of existing legislation and the introduction of a victims' assistance law.

Liechtenstein underlined its ongoing commitment by signing the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in November 2016, and preparatory works for ratification are underway.

Liechtenstein supports the efforts within the OSCE with regard to promoting gender equality in participating States and is going to continue the efforts within the country in the future.

Thank you.