



## EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2012  
Warsaw, 4 October 2012**

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### **EU statement – Session 16** DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

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Madam Moderator,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union. The OSCE participating States have confirmed the importance of democratic institutions and democratic governance for a vigorous democracy and a lasting order of peace, security, justice and co-operation in numerous OSCE documents. Most notably, they were reflected in the 1990 Copenhagen Document, the 1990 Charter of Paris and the 1999 Istanbul Charter for European Security. They were reaffirmed in the Astana Commemorative Declaration, in which Heads of State or Government emphasized that they are accountable to their citizens and responsible to each other for the full implementation of all OSCE principles and commitments, without exception.

Democratic and representative institutions are at the heart of the OSCE activities. Democracy is more than just holding elections. It is a continuous commitment to a free and open debate and civic institutions that support it.

The EU stresses the importance of the involvement of citizens in governance in a continuous manner at the national, regional and local levels. This engagement can be ensured through a wider and deeper understanding of people's day-to-day experience of living democracy. Freedom of expression and a well-informed public opinion is a prerequisite for democratic processes. Citizens should not only have access to information and be provided with different mechanisms to interact with government authorities but should also be motivated to do so. Civil society can contribute to strengthening democratic governance in a constructive and critical way by assessing the democratic performance of institutions through oversight of, and dialogue with, all branches of government and public institutions.

The EU strongly believes that the role of civil society and opposition is vital for the healthy governance of societies and States. NGOs provide unparalleled sources of expertise and advice and are an important element of democracy. Civil society and political parties can only be effective where they fully enjoy freedom of assembly and association.

Guaranteeing human rights and fundamental freedoms in the regulation of political parties is an important responsibility of every OSCE participating State and a major challenge in implementing our OSCE commitments at the same time. The Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, developed by ODIHR and the Venice Commission, provide an overview of good practices that can be applied across the entire range of democratic systems in the OSCE region.

During the Human Dimension Seminar on “The role of political parties in the political process” held in Warsaw last year, the EU formulated several recommendations to support and encourage further strengthening of democratic institutions and promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the OSCE area. It is worth recalling some of them:

- OSCE participating States should ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights and all fundamental freedoms, including through enabling their relevant national authorities, the civil society and NGOs to effectively carry out their roles.
- All participating States should live up to all OSCE commitments in the area of political parties, and in particular to guarantee political pluralism at all stages of the political process.
- Participating States should recognize the growing role of the internet in democratic governance and guarantee and respect all OSCE human dimension commitments online as well as offline.

In concluding, the EU would like to recall once again the outstanding work done by the ODIHR and the OSCE field operations through a broader range of activities to support participating States in strengthening democratic institutions and promoting human rights.

I thank you, Madam Moderator.

The Acceding Country Croatia\*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, Montenegro\*, Iceland+ and Serbia\*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

*\* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*

*+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.*