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EU Response by the Director of ODIHR

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Strohal back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive and detailed mid-year report.

The EU underlines its appreciation for the important work undertaken by the ODIHR in all fields of operation. During the first half of this year ODIHR has continued its strong efforts to assist participating States in the fulfilment of their OSCE Human Rights commitments, as foreseen in the mandate. We take note of Ambassador Strohal's comments on the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons and share his view that institutions can only be efficient and effective if they retain their autonomy, under the general guidance of the Chairmanship and Permanent Council.

Mr Chairman, a considerable number of election observation missions have been deployed by the ODIHR since Ambassador Strohal's last report. Events in Kyrgyzstan and the progress marked by the presidential elections on July 10, showed how important a role OSCE and ODIHR can play in stabilizing a volatile and largely unforeseen situation.

Post-election follow-up is, as pointed out in the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons and also mentioned by Ambassador Strohal, an important part of the election observation exercise. ODIHR reports should be used by participating States as a tool in addressing



shortcomings and in implementing commitments made. The EU encourages ODIHR to continue developing practices for comprehensive follow-up to elections and to work closely with the countries whose elections have been observed.

The EU was pleased to note that the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Challenges of Election Technologies and Procedures on 21-22 April proved a very good platform for discussion. We commend the ODIHR for providing an excellent and balanced speakers list, as well as overall management of the event. During the SHDM further discussions were held on examining a possible set of additional commitments, supplementing the existing ones in the field of elections ("Copenhagen Plus"). The EU sees potential value in such additional commitments, building on the existing ones.

Mr Chairman, the EU is pleased to learn that the recent adoption of the 2005 Unified Budget, has finally allowed the ODIHR to set up its department on Tolerance and Non-discrimination. Following the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance in Cordoba last month, special attention should now be paid to implementation of the recommendations from the reports on Hate Crimes and on Education on the Holocaust and Anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, these problems continue to be acute in large parts of the OSCE area, not least within the European Union. We invite and encourage ODIHR to use all its instruments for monitoring and advice. In this respect, we also encourage ODIHR to continue to work in closest cooperation with the three Personal Representatives on Tolerance and Non-discrimination, whose co-ordinated activities should reinforce those of ODIHR. The Personal Representatives should continue to be able to draw upon the expertise of ODIHR.

Ambassador Strohal's remark that Roma and Sinti issues have increasingly been mainstreamed into the work of the whole office is well taken. Specific attention to Roma has to be paid in election-related work as well as in conjunction with the Anti-Trafficking Programme and other relevant programmes. In doing so, however, it is important to retain the distinct role and visibility of ODIHR's Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues.

Mr Chairman, the EU expresses its continued support for ODIHR's activities within the Democratization and Human Rights Programmes, underlining the importance of rule of law and democratic institution and capacity building. The EU supports ODIHR's commitment to a methodology based on experience from countries in transition and lessons learned from field missions.



Questions relating to Human Rights in the fight against terrorism were discussed in Vienna two weeks ago at another successful SHDM. It is the view of the EU that governments must at all times respect international Human Rights law and not use the fight against terrorism to justify clampdowns or harassment of oppositional voices in the country. The EU shares Ambassador Strohal's concern about the harsh and even deteriorating conditions that NGOs face in a number of participating States.

The EU further commends ODIHR for its report on the events in Andijan and reiterates its call for the establishment of an independent international investigation into the Andijan events.

Mr Chairman, we are pleased to note that ODIHR, in planning and programming of all activities, follows the guidance of the OSCE Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality. Equal rights for men and women are of great importance for our common security and the recent Vienna meeting on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 as well as the meeting in Paris on Violence Against Women are examples of the recognition these questions have gained in the Organization.

Finally, Mr Chairman, the EU is looking forward very much to an active participation at this year's HDIM, beginning on 19 September. We wish Ambassador Strohal and his dedicated staff all the best as they prepare for this important event. Allow me once more to reiterate the EU's strong support for ODIHR and thank Ambassador Strohal and each member of his staff for their excellent work.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia ¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Ukraine and Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

¹ Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process