



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2008

Working Session 17: Democratic institutions
(9th October 2008)

EU Statement

Mr. Chairman,

Since the Treaty of Rome, the EU is based upon and defined by universal principles of liberty and democracy, respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. Adherence to these principles constitutes the foundation and basic prerequisite for peace, security and prosperity and the EU is fully committed to promote them in its common foreign and security policy.

The EU considers election observation a vital component of its activities to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide. Election observation can strengthen democratic institutions, build public confidence in electoral processes and help deter fraud, intimidation and violence. At the same time it reinforces participation, peace-making and peace-building, key objectives of the European Union foreign policy.

It is thus that the EU has become a leading force in international election observation, both by deploying its own electoral observation missions and through its support to other international initiatives. The EU approach is based on international human rights standards, in particular the universal declaration of human rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights.

The EU appreciates measures taken by ODIHR to regularly improve its election observation methodology, in particular to implement ministerial decision 19/06, and welcomes ODIHR achievements to the date. The EU is committed to continuing its close cooperation with ODIHR in this field as in others.

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Electoral observation is the OSCE main instrument to assist participating states to fulfil their election-related commitments.

In this sense the EU approach is based on the conviction that all participating states share an equal responsibility in fulfilling those commitments in all areas: from transparency and regular periodicity of scrutiny, to the establishment of electoral lists and registration of candidates, including access to media as well as freedom of speech, association and peaceful assembly.

The EU welcomes the fact that the majority of OSCE participating states fully cooperate with ODIHR, before, during, and after their elections, and calls upon all participating states to do so.

The EU underlines its willingness to further expand its co-operation with ODIHR at the level of pre-electoral assistance with a view to achieving the objective that all elections respect democratic norms and standards.

In this context, the EU would like to point out the recent conclusion of the COE-EU joint programme on free and fair elections in South Caucasus and Moldova (2008-2009) which provides a good example of co-operation on pre-electoral assistance.

The EU stresses the importance of implementing the commitments related to elections and election observation by the OSCE in all participating states and encourages dialogue on these issues. In this sense, the EU welcomed the chairmanship seminar on election related issues, which took place in Vienna on 21-22 July, with the aim of fostering constructive dialogue on election related issues in the OSCE.

The EU expresses its satisfaction with the wide support given by participating states to many essential points on election related issues, among others the importance of complying with the OSCE commitments on electoral monitoring before, during and after elections and welcomes the role and high standard of achievement of ODIHR activities in this field. The EU is open to continue dialogue on these matters and, in particular, on reinforcing the follow up of ODIHR recommendations.

The EU also wants to stress the need for an efficient and mutually reinforcing cooperation system on election observation between the ODIHR and the OSCE PA on the basis of the 1997 cooperation agreement.

Mr. Chairman,

The EU considers that, notwithstanding the importance of elections, democracy is not restricted to one-off electoral event and requires that democratic institutions discharge their electoral mandate, through consensus-driven, open and transparent processes.

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An inclusive democracy also calls for well-informed and mobilised citizens capable of participating, through effective mechanisms, in all steps of policy-making from consultations to law drafting, who can hold accountable their democratic institutions, including political parties.

Furthermore, democratisation cannot take place at central government level alone. The EU is convinced of the importance of promoting local democracy through more effective local and regional democratic government. The EU considers local and regional governments an essential instrument for participating states in implementing their human dimension commitments.

In this regard, the EU also reiterates its support to ODIHR's work in the field of local government reform and citizen participation.

Finally, referring to the need for coherence and to avoid duplication in the work of international organizations, the EU welcomes the existing cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The EU encourages both organizations to enhance and strengthen their cooperation in all fields possible, especially regarding democratic institutions.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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