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### **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 22 September - 3 October 2014**

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#### **EU Statement on Democratic Institutions, Working Session 1**

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The European Union is delighted that the recently appointed ODIHR Director, Michael Link, is addressing this opening working session on democratic institutions. This is an essential aspect of ODIHR's activities including through assisting participating States to be more responsive, accountable and representative, not least through its internationally respected election observation activity.

Our recommendations to participating States in relation to this session are:

1. Ensure the enjoyment of the fundamental freedoms of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly and association as essential means of supporting and enabling democratic governance.
2. Ensure freedom of the media in the interests of allowing for an equal playing field for campaigning for all candidates and as a means of providing access to proper information for voters.
3. Adopt a non-discriminatory and inclusive approach towards democratic participation by supporting the involvement of under-represented groups and by advancing women's political participation.
4. Foster an environment where independent civil society can freely contribute to the strengthening of democratic governance.
5. Extend early and unrestricted invitations to ODIHR to observe their elections in line with OSCE commitments.



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6. Make full use of the reports and recommendations of ODIHR Election

Observation Missions in an effort to ensure full compliance with their OSCE election related commitments.

7. Constructively engage with ODIHR on follow-up activities to Election Observation Mission reports including by making voluntary updates to the OSCE Human Dimension Committee.

Mr/Madam Moderator,

The last year has been one of highs and lows for democracy in the OSCE region, perhaps best highlighted by events in Ukraine. We saw the authorities successfully hold a presidential election characterised by an impressively high turnout despite the hostile security environment created by illegal armed groups in two eastern regions. We commend ODIHR for its outstanding election observation work in Ukraine despite the security challenges. Whilst celebrating the holding of these elections, we regret that some sections of the electorate were prevented from voting both by instability in the east and by the illegal occupation and annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea brought about by a sham referendum. Elsewhere, we have seen Presidential elections characterised by serious shortcomings in the observance of fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan and Presidential elections that failed to offer a genuine choice in Tajikistan. We have seen efficiently administered and transparent elections in Georgia although they were negatively impacted by allegations of political pressure on the main opposition party. We have also followed with interest the observation of election processes in some EU Member States. In noting these developments, we acknowledge that no participating State has a perfect record and that EU member states too must make improvements to ensure full compliance with OSCE election commitments. We take this opportunity to reiterate our unequivocal support for ODIHR's independent, impartial and professional election observation methodology



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which is widely seen as a flagship activity of the OSCE and serves as a model for other organisations including the European Union. In closing, we note with concern that beyond the holding of elections, democratic space is being consistently restricted in some participating States. The suppression of the activities of civil society, including the imprisonment of human rights defenders, violations of free expression and free media commitments as well as restrictions on the exercise of the freedoms of peaceful assembly and Association, all undermine democratic principles. Participating States should promote and protect these freedoms to allow for genuinely participatory democracies.

The Candidate Countries, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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