



## EUROPEAN UNION

# OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 21 September – 2 October 2015

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## EU Statement – Working Session 9

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Madam/Mr Moderator,

I am honoured to intervene on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The European Union is founded on the belief that the participation of the citizens in the conduct of public affairs is a pillar of democratic societies. This is achieved not only through credible elections that produce representative governments, but also through a government that is transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs and aspiration of the citizens. Genuinely democratic and participatory governance requires a strong, independent and empowered civil society that is free and able to contribute to the public and political decision-making process to the benefit of the citizens. We therefore note with deep concern the shrinking of civil society space in the region together with a worrying trend of criminalisation of human rights defenders.

Madam/Mr Moderator

Transparent, credible and competitive elections are the cornerstone of democracy, and for this reason the EU grants the utmost importance to the election observation activities conducted by ODIHR. Let me express our full support to ODIHR's mandate in assisting participating States in complying with their election-related commitments, and our full acknowledgement of ODIHR's capacity and authority to decide the format of the Electoral Observation Missions that best responds to the conditions and needs of the electoral process to be observed.



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Likewise, we reiterate our unequivocal support to its long-standing and well-established methodology that is the safeguard of an independent, impartial and professional election observation which allows ODIHR to effectively deliver on its mandate. This methodology has inspired other organisations, including the EU. Both ODIHR and the EU support and re-commit to the implementation of the Declaration of Principles (DoP) for International Election Observation. The EU is working thoroughly towards further implementing OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions recommendations to contribute to strengthening democratic institutions and to further improve electoral processes.

The EU attaches paramount importance to providing ODIHR with sufficient financial and human resources for Electoral Observation Missions to provide an informed and factual assessment of the electoral processes that meets the highest professional standards in view of issuing the relevant recommendations, which are key for improving the overall electoral framework and for strengthening democratic institutions. Failure to secure these resources undermines ODIHR's mandate.

In this respect, the EU notes with deep concern the increasing difficulties faced by ODIHR to obtain the requested number of seconded observers, as was made apparent in the case, inter alia, of the recent elections in Albania and Kazakhstan. We deeply regret that Azerbaijan placed restrictions on ODIHR's planned election observation for the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan. We share the view expressed by ODIHR that the insistence on a restricted number of observers is directly counter to OSCE commitments and in contradiction to ODIHR's election observation mandate. This insistence has compelled ODIHR to cancel its election observation mission. We call on Azerbaijan to engage in discussions with ODIHR on how ODIHR can provide assistance to Azerbaijan in the implementation of its election-related and other OSCE commitments



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Therefore, our recommendations to the Participating States in relation to this session are:

1. Ensure the right of citizens to political participation, in a free and fair climate without undue restrictions imposed by the administration, violence, intimidation or fear of retribution, against voters, candidates, parties and elected representatives, both in the run-up to and beyond the elections.
2. Ensure the right to stand for election, without any undue restrictions, allowing for the representation of the whole diversity of interests present in society at large.
3. Ensure transparent, pluralist and competitive elections that provide the electorate with a genuine choice on the basis of a level playing field and an informed vote.
4. Secure timely financial and human resources needed by ODIHR to carry out effectively its election observation activities in the region.
5. Extend early and unrestricted invitations to ODIHR to observe their elections in line with OSCE commitments
6. Constructively engage on follow-up activities to Election Observation reports in cooperation with ODIHR, including by making voluntary updates to the OSCE Human Dimension Committee.
7. Ensure a strong, independent and empowered civil society that is free and able to contribute to the public and political decision-making process to the benefit of the citizens.

Madam/Mr Moderator,

Democratic societies cannot be achieved without democratic checks and balances. This requires in particular strengthening the role and function of the parliaments, as a space of open debate where to freely discuss, propose, formulate and democratically adopt legislation, as well as where to exercise due control over the executive power.



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Likewise, equal participation and representation of women and men in all decision-making structures is key for the advancement of truly functioning democratic societies.

Finally, it is essential that participating States actively promote and protect fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly and association, including freedom of the media, which are the enablers of the rest of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, and without whose full exercise and enjoyment no genuine democracy is possible.

Thank you.

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 countries LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members 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.