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STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE DIRECTOR OF
THE OFFICE FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 7 March 2019

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It is a pleasure to welcome ODIHR Director Ingibjörg Gísladóttir back to the Permanent Council, and we thank her for her presentation of the ODIHR Annual Report for 2018.

As last year, we appreciate the integration of a gender perspective in the report. Identifying the level of female participation in various activities helps indicate where good work is being done and where more efforts are needed. Such openness is commendable. In 2018, just over half of participants at human rights events were women. This is as it should be.

However, statistics and data can only make a difference when used to inform and adjust practical measures. We cannot research ourselves to equal opportunity and participation. Data can only show us where we are, so that we understand where we need to get. It is time to think harder about what impact our activities have on gender equality, both within the OSCE structures and within the participating States. This is difficult work, but absolutely necessary. While we are well aware of what activities we are undertaking, we need to get clearer about what we are achieving.

The report presented today once again demonstrates the integrity and professionalism of ODIHR and its staff. It demonstrates steadfast adherence to OSCE principles and commitments in co-operation with participating States. ODIHR has an important part to play across many thematic areas of the OSCE's work.

ODIHR helps ensure that efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism are fully compliant with human rights. This is essential for success.

As pointed out by the Director, discrimination against Roma and Sinti remains widespread and must be countered. This is a task for all of us. The report indicates several efforts in the Western Balkans, covering elections and their follow-up, youth

engagement, as well as promoting tolerance. Developments in the Western Balkans matter for the entire OSCE region. The Balkans deserve our attention.

In 2018, ODIHR observed elections in 16 participating States, half of which were full-scale observation missions. ODIHR's comprehensive, needs-based, consistent and systematic methodology for election observation ensures credibility.

While there were no elections in Norway in 2018, we were still pleased to receive a follow-up visit from ODIHR that offered advice and discussion on our implementation of past ODIHR electoral recommendations. We also welcomed an ODIHR assembly monitoring exercise around the Labour Day celebrations in Oslo on 1 May. We were also pleased that ODIHR chose Norway for a study visit from prosecutors in participating States in Eastern Europe, focusing on avoiding undue influence on investigations and prosecutions.

ODIHR stands at the disposal of participating States for support and assistance. It is an autonomous institution under the direction of Director Gísladóttir. She has our full trust and support in fulfilling ODIHR's increasingly relevant mandate. ODIHR is the central institution for the human dimension, but the human dimension as such belongs to the participating States. It seems necessary to remind ourselves that it is we, the participating States, that have the responsibility to provide ODIHR with the necessary resources to carry out the mandate that we have given ODIHR.

Broadly speaking, ODIHR is a lasting instrument of implementation only of what the states have agreed. In the parish-pump politics of the Hofburg, we do well to remember that. While we disagree about much in the Permanent Council, we must not let those disagreements influence the autonomous efforts of ODIHR to implement what we have actually managed to agree to by consensus.