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### **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 11-22 September 2017**

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#### **Working session 3: Democratic institutions, including democracy at the national, regional and local levels, democratic elections**

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Madam/Mr. Moderator,

I am honoured to present this statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The EU is fully committed to fostering the values and principles of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, including civil and political rights, worldwide. We believe that active participation of civil society; credible, inclusive and transparent elections; pluralism, non-discrimination, safeguarding fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, freedom of media, freedom of peaceful assembly and association; credible, inclusive and transparent elections; and effectiveness of the local and regional governments, are all inseparable and vital for sustaining modern democratic societies.

Strong democratic institutions help ensure transparency and accountability, long-term growth and stability, and active involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes.

Madam/Mr. Moderator,

Our recommendations in relation to this session are the following:

- Participating States shall take all appropriate measures to increase participation of persons belonging to under-represented groups in decision making and political life, in particular, a stronger emphasis should be placed on the involvement of women, youth, and persons belonging to marginalized groups such as national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities as well as persons with disabilities;



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- We invite participating States to further enhance transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of elections, encourage political pluralism and to make sure that the voters are given a genuine democratic choice;
- Participating States shall ensure adequate conditions for the development of effective local democracy;
- Participating States shall further engage in promoting genuine dialogue with civil society and refrain from imposing unnecessary limitations on activities of the civil society organizations. They shall also enhance efforts to protect human rights defenders from any persecution or infringements on their human rights;
- We encourage the Participating States to actively support freedom of the media, which constitute a prerequisite for credible, inclusive and transparent democratic processes;
- We advocate for a closer cooperation with ODIHR Election Observation Missions (EOMs), i.e. through extending early and unrestricted invitations, which enable ODIHR to conduct a Needs Assessment Mission in a timely manner, as well as through engaging on follow-up activities, especially by implementing ODIHR recommendations and submitting voluntary reports to the OSCE Human Dimension Committee;
- We call on participating States to make sure that ODIHR has sufficient resources to conduct its activities, as well as to continue seconding observers or contributing to the ODIHR's Observation Sustainability Fund;
- We also encourage the participating States to further develop cooperation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in the overall OSCE's work in the field of election observation.

Madam/Mr. Moderator,



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In virtue of the EU's second Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019), we remain firm in our support to ODIHR activities, in particular, building and consolidating democratic institutions, advancing democratic reform, reinforcing open civil societies and promoting credible and transparent elections.

We reiterate our full support to ODIHR's mandate and autonomy, as well as its widely and internationally recognized election observation methodology - endorsed in the MC Decision 19/06 and based on the principles of independence, impartiality and professionalism - which has been used by other organizations, including the EU, as a basis for developing their own election observation guidelines.

The EU has for several years undertaken a wide range of actions to advance and promote ODIHR's recommendations, as we believe that no electoral process is perfect and that only by acknowledging and addressing our own shortcomings are we credible to others.

To give an example, the EU's second Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy requires consolidating best practices for leveraging both the OSCE/ODHIR and EU EOM recommendations in EU and EU Member States' political dialogues and democracy support activities.

It is also in this context that the brochure "Beyond Election Day: Best practices for follow-up to EU Election Observation Missions" was presented to public during the European Development Days on 8 June 2017 in Brussels.

We note with satisfaction that over the years, the scope of co-operation between the OSCE and the EU has both broadened and deepened. Reaffirming the shared goals, principles and values, we wish to build upon synergies in the field of democratization and join efforts in the observation of electoral processes.

In this regard, we would like to mention the project supporting democratic elections in the Western Balkans, jointly launched in June this year by the EU and the ODIHR.



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The three-year project, implemented by ODIHR, will support the Western Balkans countries in following-up on election observation recommendations in areas related to election management, voter registration and the conduct of the media during election campaigns.

Madam / Mr. Moderator,

A genuine electoral process is not only about the Election Day. There also needs to be a political will to address identified weaknesses and further consolidate democratic institutions with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

Therefore, we attach great importance to the recommendations emerging from the OSCE EOMs, both inside and outside the EU, be it in the frame of follow-up meetings with the relevant authorities and other stakeholders, legal assessments, publications, i.e. the election standards handbooks, or through the annual Election Seminar.

While we are benefitting from all ODIHR's assistance work, we also have to remember that the primary responsibility to implement electoral recommendations lies with us, the Participating States, as we obliged ourselves to, i.a. back in 1999 in Istanbul. We are committed to upholding those obligations.

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 ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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