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Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to thank the organizing committee of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting for kindly inviting me to attend this important event and deliver introductory remarks at the working session that deals with democratic institutions, political rights, and democracy.

Participants of this session were presented with a list of twelve important questions related to the subject matter of our panel. With all due respect I will not be able to address all of them *albeit* superficially in ten minutes allotted for my presentation. Therefore I picked three questions which are close to the sphere of my expertise and academic research. They are:

- What are the key challenges participating States face in ensuring political pluralism and inclusive democratic governance at local, regional and national levels?
- How can legislation, regulations and codes of conduct contribute to increased transparency and accountability of political institutions such as political parties and parliaments?
- How can the OSCE – particularly ODIHR, other institutions and field operations – support participating States in ensuring greater political pluralism at all levels of government?

Last year at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting at the panel devoted to democratic institutions, Georgiy Satarov delivered a very thoughtful and insightful presentation. His main point was that it would be a mistake to overestimate the significance of formal political institutions for democratic development. Mister Satarov argued that even well-designed formal political institutions can be undermined or moreover made *de facto* useless by informal norms and traditions that exist in a particular society. While it is relatively easy to change formal political institutions, it is quite difficult to change informal institutions including political culture, traditions etc. A country, where these two types of institutions are in the opposition to each other, faces a dilemma which does not have easy or fast solutions. Mr.Satarov called for a complex multifaceted approach to the development of recommendations for designers of democratic institutions. These would include contributions not only from representatives of the legal profession but the involvement of sociologists, social psychologists, political scientists and historians.

It is difficult to disagree with Mr.Satarov's argumentation. Of course, a focus on formal legal institutions alone while ignoring political culture and social realities is a recipe for disaster. Recent history of the republics that emerged after the disintegration of the Soviet Union is rich of such unsuccessful and sometimes tragic examples.

However, having mostly agreed with Mr.Satarov, for the rest of my presentation I would like to advance a somewhat different message: "Formal political institutions are not to be neglected." Well-designed democratic institutions (and by well-designed democratic institutions I mean those institutions which provide for political pluralism and democratic governance in a given country context) may not only promote democratic transitions directly but might have a profound effect on political culture and social traditions shaping them in a way which is more conducive for democratic development. Let me illustrate my point on a real life example based on my research on Ukrainian political parties. Although it might seem that my example has a somewhat narrow scope I can assure you that its implications are directly applicable both to other political institutions (elections, parliaments, etc.) as well as to many other OSCE member-countries.

Although a problem of creation of a viable and stable party system is relevant for all nations that undergo democratic political change, post-Soviet countries face a particular challenge in this regard – they had to design their national party systems from scratch.

Let me begin with the following three statements.

Statement 1. Political parties are necessary though not a sufficient element to a democratic political system.

Throughout centuries scholars of democratic theory and political parties have emphasized the instrumental role of political parties for democracy:

- Parties are inevitable. No free large country has been without them. No one has shown how representative government could be worked without them. (James Bryce, 1921)
- Modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties. (E.E.Schattschneider, 1942)
- Citizens in Western democracies are represented through and by parties. This is inevitable. (Giovani Sartory, 1968)
- Parties are a necessary evil in free governments (Alexis de Tocqueville, 1831)

Statement 2. A level of political institutionalization of parties and party systems positively correlates with the success of democracy.

"The historical evidence … suggests that the crucial consideration for democracy is … the degree of party institutionalization. All of our cases call attention to the institutional strength or weakness of parties as a determinant of success or failure with democracy, and each of them grapples with the problem of institutionalization." (Diamond and Linz, 1989).

Statement 3. In many European nations including representatives of the former communist bloc (and Ukraine is being one of them) the general population has little trust in political parties.

For example, according to public opinion polls conducted by Razumkov Center (perhaps the most trusted polling company in Ukraine) in the past 12 years (since this poll has been introduced) between 70% to 85% respondents answered that they do not trust political parties. In the past seven years the percentage of those who have a complete trust in political parties was between 0.4% and 3.9% never exceeding 4% of population.

A leading scholar of political institutionalization, Samuel Huntington, defined a political institution as "a recurrent stable pattern of behavior," and the process of institutionalization as the process by which "organizations and procedures acquire value and stability." Therefore, if both active political actors and general electorate do not accept certain organizations and procedures as something valuable and stable, than it is impossible to consider such organizations and procedures as viable political institutions.

In other words, Ukraine as well as many other countries where the electorate has little trust in political parties faces a serious dilemma. On one hand, a developed and institutionalized system of political parties is a must requirement for a successful functioning of democracy. On the other hand, political actors and electorate hold political parties in low esteem and do not view them as viable institutions that possess trust, value, and stability.

Is a solution possible? What are the options? Someone might argue that in the Western countries the process of institutionalization of political parties took many years and newly democratizing countries ought to follow the same pattern focusing on changing social conditions, political culture, and mentality of political actors. At some point of their development these nations will come to accept parties as important and trusted institutions, and, in turn, parties will be able to fill their unique niche in the political system.

However, a transitional country can hardly afford to wait that long. After all, political parties might never become "gatekeepers" of democracy on their own because of a lack of transparency and openness of funding and functioning of political parties. In the eyes of the general public, in the post-Soviet space, many of them resemble organized criminal groups that fight for political power and financial privileges. Of course, it is not a way to gain trust among the electorate.

There is another possible option. This is to create a legislative and institutional framework that artificially boosts the role of political parties in a society, in other words to within transitional societies create a well-known in Europe model of "a party government." Of course such measures would not add to popularity and respect to political parties automatically. However, even if voters dislike parties they would have no choice but to select between competing parties punishing or rewarding them based on their performance during free and fair elections. Aspiring politicians would come to recognition that parties are exclusive vehicles to political power and there are no other channels to power outside of a party system. Political parties would be forced to take periodical political examinations in electoral contests. In conditions of democratic elections such legislative and institutional framework would necessarily lead to greater identifiability and accountability of political parties in the society.

Let me return to Ukraine. Before 2005 political parties in this nation were called virtual. They were "not the building blocks of Ukrainian politics the way they are in many states, and they play(ed) a relatively peripheral role in structuring political competition" (Wilson and Birch, 2007).

During 2004-2005 three important events took place which boosted the role of parties in the Ukrainian political system.

First, on March 25, 2004, the national legislature, the Rada, passed a new version of the Law on Elections of People's Deputies of Ukraine replacing a mixed electoral model used in the two previous electoral cycles with a full proportional representation system for elections to the national and regional parliaments. Political parties have become an exclusive vehicle to political power.

Second, in December 2004, as a part of the constitutional compromise among political elites at the peak of the Orange Revolution in order to prevent the reemergence of a "superpresidential" regime the Ukrainian parliament passed the constitutional reform transferring some instrumental political powers from the office of the president to the parliament and the prime minister and strengthening the role of political parties in the government formation.

Third, another legacy of the Orange Revolution was an attempt to establish and legitimize free and fair elections as the exclusive mechanism of obtaining state power. Political elites of different shades came one important step closer to realizing that an electoral fraud is not going to be tolerated and a competitive electoral contest is "the only game in town" for aspiring politicians on their way to political Olympus.

A combination of these three factors – (1) a formation of the whole composition of the national parliament based on proportional representation, (2) the transfer of important powers from the president to the parliament, and (3) an emphasis on free and fair elections as an exclusive means of gaining parliamentary representation - gave an additional powerful incentive to political parties to assert their niche in the society. As a result, the level of institutionalization of the Ukrainian party system has advanced considerably in a short period. (This topic is a subject of my academic research. Of course, this seminar is not a good venue to discuss my methodology, but I'll be happy to explain it to anyone who might be interested in the topic).

Unfortunately, after the 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine, the legislative mechanism that assisted advancing political institutionalization of the national party system has been dismantled step-by-step:

(1) First, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine proclaimed the constitutional reform that transferred some political powers from the presidency to the parliament unconstitutional;

(2) Second, in 2011, the Ukrainian parliament passed a new electoral law reintroducing a mixed voting system with 50% of the future members of the Rada elected in the majoritarian districts.

(3) Third, the concept of free and fair elections still remains more like a dream in the post-Soviet space.

A return to the mixed electoral system, the abolition of the constitutional reform, and massive violations at parliamentary and local elections held since 2010 reverse the process of further institutionalization of the Ukrainian party system hindering democratic developments in this nation.

In conclusion, I would like to make several suggestions. Let me emphasize: implications I draw from my case study of the Ukrainian political parties are highly relevant to other democratic institutions in many OSCE member-states.

First, formal political institutions are not to be neglected. They may have and indeed do have a direct influence on the state of democracy in a nation.

Second, formal political institutions may have an effect on political culture and social norms and traditions.

Third, recommendations for enhancement of a democratic political system require a complex multifaceted approach which requires contributions from multiple spheres of knowledge.

And finally, from time to time the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its institutions, including ODIHR, publish studies and issue recommendations on important topics for the OSCE member-countries. Since many leading experts on the subjects are involved in the preparation of these documents, for the most part they are thoughtful, timely, and of a solid quality. OSCE member-countries would be well-served is they take these recommendations seriously and start discussions in their countries which would involve all major stakeholders including governmental institutions, NGOs, and of course, the academia. Implementation of the OSCE recommendations is hardly possible without prior understanding and nation-wide discussion of the issues involved.