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Address by

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\*) Corr.1 only due to change of distribution status, text remains the same

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address the Permanent Council here in the Hofburg today to present ODIHR's latest Annual Report. Your feedback and observations are an important guidance for our work, as we seek to remain in dialogue with all participating States across the many areas of our mandate.

My thanks to North Macedonia and Ambassador Igor Djundev as Chair of the OSCE for the support and close cooperation we have established in the past months. At the same time, I wish to reiterate my sincere thanks to last year's Polish Chair, Ambassador Adam Hałaciński and his team, for the close partnership we enjoyed over the course of 2022 and their committed support.

As I look back at more than two years as Director of ODIHR, it is clearer to me than ever about how unique and how precious our common principles of human dignity, democracy and inclusion, remain. And how important they continue to be in keeping our societies just and secure.

And yet, this conviction is challenged by a small, but increasingly vocal group. I am certain it is no coincidence that parts of the mandate of an institution like ODIHR, focused on assisting countries in the implementation of these principles and standards, are a target.

It is therefore with a sense of deep responsibility that all of us at ODIHR remain committed to our work. To put it in a nutshell: the rule of law, democracy and human rights continue to be the best and most sustainable safeguards to make sure that governments are held accountable to their citizens, and to ensure lasting security and stability across our region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I begin to reflect on ODIHR's work over 2022, it is impossible to overstate the significance of the last year on our common security architecture, the principles of international law, and indeed our very own aspirations within the OSCE. With its invasion of Ukraine in February last year, the Russian Federation has brought war back to our region on a scale long forgotten, creating a humanitarian crisis that is affecting the lives of millions of innocent people.

As long as this crisis continues, we will also continue to call for an end to human rights violations. ODIHR has been monitoring violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Ukraine for over a year now, and have so far conducted more than 140 in-depth interviews with survivors and witnesses of violations both in Ukraine and outside the country. Our key findings were published in two public reports in July and December last year, which you can find in the dedicated Ukraine section on the ODIHR website. Our ongoing human rights monitoring work will continue this year. We will also continue to work to

contribute to accountability for all those responsible for human rights violations supporting and assisting prosecution and investigation platforms. In this respect, we will also contribute to the efforts to ascertain the condition of children deported from Ukraine and work with relevant authorities, international institutions and civil society to ensure their rights are respected.

Ukraine has been a priority of ODIHR's work in many ways over the last year. Our assistance at this critical time has included support to the Ukrainian Parliament to improve its democratic procedures, combatting human trafficking in neighboring countries, training human rights defenders, and monitoring the specific human rights challenges affecting Roma people who have fled the conflict.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are seeing threats to democracy and human rights in many places across the OSCE region. In fact, one of the most valuable lessons we need to learn is the fact that it is already when the restrictions to fundamental human rights begin, when freedoms are violated, when democratic standards and institutions are undermined, and when the voices of civil society are stifled, that security begins to crumble, and our societies - our people - suffer.

ODIHR has been ringing this bell for many years. But as you will see in the report you have in front of you, we do not just criticize shortcomings. Preserving and further strengthening the human dimension of the OSCE is today the most important contribution we can all make to peace and security in our region – and that is what ODIHR is doing, every day.

Let me begin with our widely recognized work on elections and some figures. In 2022, ODIHR conducted 15 election observation activities in 13 OSCE countries, deploying over 1,400 observers thanks to your support as participating States. It may be of interest that 10 of these 15 observations took place in EU Member States — two of which were large-scale election observation missions. We also published 48 election-related reports in 2022, providing comprehensive assessments and recommendations on how to improve the election process. As every year, the Office also continued to train election observers and to update its observation methodology, including through two new Handbooks.

We are proud of these remarkable numbers, which testify to the importance of this work and the needed determination to defend it. With important elections approaching in Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Turkmenistan, Bulgaria, Uzbekistan, Albania, Turkey and Poland, just to name a few, we look forward to your support and contributions. In the next months, we will conduct 7 concurring election observation activities, highlighting the capability of ODIHR to deliver on its mandate in this important area of work.

2022 has also marked an important year in our work on rule of law. In Moldova, ODIHR assisted the ongoing judicial reform providing legal opinions on relevant legislation, as well as by monitoring the 'pre-vetting' process of candidates to the two national judicial self-governing bodies. Following a welcome invitation by the Kazakh authorities and in co-operation with the Supreme Court, ODIHR has also been monitoring trials in connection with the demonstrations

that took place across Kazakhstan in January 2022. This work will continue, and public reports will be released with our findings and recommendations.

In 2022, ODIHR also organized its first-ever moot court competition on the rights of people with disabilities open to law students from across the OSCE region. With research telling us minorities and people with disabilities are often under-represented among judges and prosecutors in our region, ODIHR will work to prevent discrimination of people with disabilities whenever appearing in court.

Assistance to parliaments remains another important area of our work. In 2022 alone, ODIHR issued 24 legal opinions covering 14 countries. We also worked on three comprehensive assessments of legislative processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uzbekistan and Armenia respectively. Specific support was then provided to the Office of the Public Defender of Armenia on the use of human rights assessment tools and to the parliamentary staff of the Parliament of Montenegro on innovative lawmaking procedures, illustrating the breath of assistance ODIHR is able to offer.

In the field of gender equality, ODIHR has built on its previous work with a new toolkit and a wide range of activities. With violence against women in all its forms recognised by OSCE countries as one of the most pervasive impediments to women's participation in political and public life, ODIHR's set of five tools to address violence against women in politics contains recommendations for legislators, governments, parliaments and political parties as well as guidance for civil society and women politicians affected by violence.

Also in 2022 and based on ODIHR's guide to increase gender equality in parliament, we provided training on gender-sensitive parliaments in Tajikistan, North Macedonia, and Kyrgyzstan to members of parliaments and parliamentary staff, as well as carrying out a full gender audit in cooperation with the Parliament of Malta.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The work of the many brave human rights defenders around the OSCE region has become more difficult, with in some cases unprecedented challenges to their ability to work safely and effectively. One of the newest but also most popular tools to support the work of human rights defenders is the FreedomLab website. As an e-learning platform, FreedomLab teaches the critical skills needed to respond effectively to continually evolving human rights situations as well as the threats that accompany them. With over 100 thousand unique users today, and a growing set of available tools, this platform represents a concrete support widely appreciated by the international human rights community.

Freedom of assembly and association are also consistently under the monitoring of ODIHR. Last year, in addition to conducting assembly monitoring in France and Romania, we also released a new publication on the impact of COVID-19 on the right to peaceful assembly, reflecting on developments and challenges during the pandemic, which continue to prove relevant in ensuring respect for this right as we move ahead.

Unfortunately, pressure is affecting also the work of National Human Rights Institutions in a number of countries. ODIHR has developed a new guidance tool focused on strengthening the resilience of NHRIs that premiered in 2022.

Last but not least, I would like to draw your attention to our work on hate crime. Hate crimes do not only violate human rights, but also convey a message of inequality and rejection that can polarize communities and societies and potentially lead to wider conflict. Following the publication of our latest Hate Crime Report in November, our team is already working on the next one, and I wish to thank all States and civil society groups that are submitting data. We will also pay special attention to the impact of the conflict in Ukraine on intolerance, discrimination and hatred in a number of OSCE countries, in light of the increase of anti-Ukrainian and anti-Russian hate crimes. I also take this opportunity to highlight our ongoing work to develop a new Practical Guide on Understanding Anti-Christian Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Christian Communities, which we expect to publish in 2024.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

ODIHR continues to deliver numerous assistance programs in many other areas, equally important, in the form of capacity building and exchange platforms for parliaments, police, judges, prisons personnel, civil society, migrant workers, religious communities, and others. Our self-advocacy training for Roma and Sinti women conducted in Poland and North Macedonia is just one example.

In all these efforts, ODIHR's work with civil society remains paramount. This was clearly on view at the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, which saw participants from 50 OSCE countries and around 600 civil society representatives.

Once again, we very much regret that consensus could not be reached on holding the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, and I hope it will be possible this year. However, the Human Dimension Conference in Warsaw was nonetheless a positive signal to the OSCE human rights community, as well as for us at ODIHR. As always, my thanks go to all our civil society partners for their insight and expertise, but also for their courage and determination to shed light on human rights abuses wherever they take place.

In 2022, the Moscow Mechanism was invoked three times. In line with its mandate, ODIHR supported the process from a technical and administrative point of view, with the aim of ensuring that the appointed experts could do their work. I would here take the opportunity to remind states of their commitment to nominate experts to the resource list.

At the same time, I wish to express my gratitude for the support and appreciation for ODIHR's work I have received last year from the overwhelming majority of participating States. At the same time, I will also continue to listen carefully to those who are not fully satisfied with our work. Dialogue is a two-way street – in ODIHR's work as in all other matters – in which differences of opinions should be recognized and discussed. No country will ever be perfect in its democratic practices and human rights standards. And we are not perfect either. But I can

assure you that, whatever the challenges we face, ODIHR will continue to offer its assistance in all areas of our mandate, on the basis of dialogue, positive engagement and constructive criticism.

As I have stressed before and will continue to do: the best way to support ODIHR, our work and our mandate, is to work with us and request our assistance - by seeking our legislative reviews, hosting our trainings, inviting us to monitor elections and to work on election reforms, and by welcoming us with an open mind to monitor human rights standards and to foster social inclusion. We look forward to your cooperation.

To continue our work of the high quality you expect of us, and we expect of ourselves, however, we need to be able to count on financial certainty and sufficient resources. The current economic situation and particularly the high levels of inflation, is exerting substantial pressure on our financial ability to conduct activities. Continuing to operate on the basis of an un-approved budget, and with ZNG since 2009, is simply not sustainable and in perspective, will be fatal. Legitimate expectations for ODIHR to deliver professionally on its mandate cannot shy away from these significant budgetary constraints, and I hope a solution which takes equally into account all dimensions of the OSCE can will soon be found.

Against this background, I would like to express my gratitude to all the participating States that continue to support our work financially and thus ensure that important areas of our work can continue and progress.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing I wish to thank all ODIHR's staff for their professionalism, creativity, commitment and passion over what has been an extremely demanding year.

As we look ahead, I am encouraged by the excellent cooperation ODIHR maintains with the Secretary General, the Representative for the Freedom of the Media, the Office of the High Commissioner for National Minorities, and the Parliamentary Assembly. I would also like to congratulate Ireland and Ambassador Anne-Marie Callan for taking the helm of our Human Dimension Committee – a role which we look forward to meaningfully support.

Indeed, we must all work together.

I thank you for your attention and support, and I look forward to hearing your questions and reflections.

Thank you.