

WARSAW, 9 October 2006

OSCE HDIM-WORKING SESSION 10:
Democratic Institutions

STATEMENT BY THE GREEK DELEGATION

I would like to express our great appreciation for participating in today's discussion of the Democratic institutions and elections, issues which for the countries of the OSCE fundamentally concern the legitimization of their state structures and authorities.

We believe that a lot of progress remains to be made in the OSCE area in the field of democratic elections and institutions, as well as in the field of fundamental freedoms. We also believe that all states recognize that the free expression of the will of the people is the only basis on which a modern state can build its authority.

The conduct of free elections, although the condition sine qua non of the existence of a democratic state, is not enough for characterizing a state as of fully functioning Democracy. The last presupposes the existence of an environment of free expression of the people, before and after the elections, as well as the essential participation of the people in public life. Democracy is not a static structure, it is a dynamic process entailing an continuously increasing involvement of the people in making decisions.

The role of ODIHR has been proven fundamental in promoting democratic processes, and its acquired experience can benefit all participating states.

Following these remarks, allow me to inform you on the enactment by the Greek Parliament of a number of local government participatory institutions (Law 3463/2006).

In particular the new Municipal and Communal Code:

- Allows the municipalities and communities to conduct local referenda on important local issues that fall within their responsibilities such as local transport, waste and natural resources management etc. In most cases referenda will be instigated by local councils based on a two thirds majority of their members. Voters can also ask for a referendum to take place in order to merge their district with a neighboring municipality, following a request signed by the one third of the citizens. In the new Code it is foreseen that the citizens of the municipalities have the right to submit petitions and queries concerning acts and decisions of the local authorities, to which the latter are obliged to answer within thirty days.

The new Code stresses that all citizens, without any exception, will have access to the local services as well as to information on local affairs.

Furthermore a "Charter of Rights and Duties" was adopted, together with a " Citizen's Guide" on services available by the local authorities and on access to Information.

I take this opportunity to inform that municipal elections will take place in Greece on the 15th of this month.