



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

PC.DEL/472/08
12 June 2008

ENGLISH only

Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 716
12 June 2008**

EU statement in response to the report by the Director of the ODIHR, Ambassador Christian Strohal

The European Union warmly welcomes you, Ambassador Strohal, back to the Permanent Council and would like to thank you for your - as usual - informative presentation.

Dear Ambassador Strohal, as you have mentioned, this is your final report as Director of the ODIHR to the PC. Let me take this opportunity to thank you for your tireless engagement in the promotion of democracy, human rights and tolerance over the last five years. In a competent and professional manner, you and your dedicated staff have successfully steered the ODIHR through difficult times and challenges. The report "Common Responsibility: Commitments and Implementation", which was issued by the ODIHR in 2006, is part of your legacy to the OSCE and will continue to offer guidance for the ODIHR's role within our organisation.

The EU would like to commend you for initiatives regarding the strategic orientation of the ODIHR - such as mainstreaming cross-cutting issues in the work of the office and enhanced activities with relevance beyond the Human Dimension of the OSCE including, for example, human rights aspects with regard to the armed forces and the police. We also fully share your belief that the promotion of democratisation and the rule of law can have positive impacts not only on the human aspects of security, but also on the political and economical stability of participating states.

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Equally, we commend your efforts to increase the ODIHR's outreach towards other relevant stakeholders in the field of human rights and democratisation such as international organisations, NGOs and other representatives of civil society. We welcome your activities aiming at enhancing access to information and public awareness, in particular through newly established internet sites such as TANDIS and LEGISLATIONONLINE.

The EU would also like to encourage the ODIHR to continue its intensified cooperation with other relevant OSCE institutions such as the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on the Freedom of the Media and the three personal representatives of the Chairman-in-Office on tolerance and non-discrimination and the OSCE Field Operations.

Election-related activities are often considered as a "flagship" activity of the OSCE. The number and geographical scope of election missions deployed over the past five years is impressive. The EU continues to support the ODIHR's specific election observation methodology which has been established over many years, enjoys widespread international recognition and serves as a model for, among others, EU election observation missions.

Ambassador Strohal, in the past five years, you have tirelessly contributed to further developing, refining and improving the ODIHR's already high standards for election observation. Moreover, you have personally not shied away from any discussion to defend these high standards against all efforts to question or weaken them. The EU has constantly supported and defended the ODIHR's strong mandate, its freedom from political influence and its operational autonomy as a basis for its widely recognised professionalism, and we will maintain this support in the future.

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The EU appreciates the efficient and mutually reinforcing cooperation on election observation between the ODIHR and the OSCE PA on the basis of the 1997 Cooperation Agreement as seen during a number of recent election observation missions. We look forward to the seminar on election-related issues to be organised by the Finnish Chairmanship in July, and we are convinced that the ODIHR, with its longstanding experience, can offer a valuable contribution to this useful exchange of views.

The EU commends the ODIHR for its activities in the Human Dimension of the OSCE so far this year, and in particular for the excellent organisation of the Human Dimension Seminar on Constitutional Justice and the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the role of National Institutions against Discrimination in Combating Racism and Xenophobia. We look forward with special interest to the meeting of national focal points on hate crimes in June 2008, building up on the ODIHR's valuable monitoring and reporting activities on hate crimes in the OSCE area.

The EU would also like to highlight the value of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the most important event in the annual Human Dimension calendar. It presents a unique opportunity not only for participating States, but in particular also for NGOs to engage in a lively dialogue on Human Dimension issues. The EU continues to argue for balance in the agenda of the HDIM, devoting due and equal attention to all OSCE Human Dimension commitments, as well as for strong and unhindered NGO participation in OSCE events.

The EU also strongly encourages the ODIHR to strengthen, including through its Focal Point, its activities in support of human rights defenders and national human rights institutions on the basis of OSCE commitments. We also support the ODIHR's activities on tolerance and non-discrimination, which should be pursued in close

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cooperation with the Chairmanship's three personal representatives, as well as the activities on Roma and Sinti issues. In this regard, we look forward with great interest to the second SHDM this year to be held in July.

Finally, the EU would like to wish you, Ambassador Strohal, every success in the further pursuit of your diplomatic career. At the same time, we are confident that you will leave the ODIHR in good hands when handing over to our highly esteemed former colleague, Ambassador Lenarčič.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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