



## EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Human Dimension Seminar  
Warsaw, 18-20 May 2011

### **EU Opening statement at the 2011 Human Dimension Seminar on 'The Role of Political Parties in the Political Process'**

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Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we have celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and witnessed the inauguration of its new premises yesterday, please allow me first to address a few words to Ambassador Lenarčič and his dedicated staff. First of all, we congratulate them! We wish them a good start in the new premises which, we trust, will enable them to continue their excellent work. We are heartened by Ambassador Lenarčič's words about the excellent relations of ODIHR with the host country, Poland.

From the outset, the EU has been a strong and consistent supporter of ODIHR, of its mandate and its work. Many of our Member States have greatly profited from ODIHR's advise and support in their own efforts towards successful democratic transition. The full implementation of commitments in the Human Dimension is a permanent challenge to all of us. It requires constant efforts by governments, and constant vigilance by the media and civil society. The ODIHR is and will remain at the core of the OSCE's institutional architecture in supporting participating States in meeting this challenge. Once again – thank you for your dedicated, excellent work!

Mr Chairman,

Turning now to our 2011 Human Dimension Seminar, the EU thanks ODIHR for organising this event on “The role of political Parties in the Political process”. We would also like to welcome all the panellists who accepted the invitation to contribute to our discussions. We equally welcome the representatives of other international organisations, academia, political parties, legal practitioners and civil society. The EU is convinced that it is essential to maintain a free and open dialogue between the NGOs and the participating States of the OSCE, as established by the Helsinki 1992 document. This is one of the principal strengths of our Organisation.

OSCE participating States have confirmed the importance of democratic institutions and democratic governance for a vigorous democracy and a lasting order of peace, security, justice and co-operation in numerous OSCE documents. The role and importance of political parties for a pluralistic democracy have been also confirmed. In the Copenhagen Document (1990) participating States committed themselves not to merge political parties with the state. Furthermore, they signed up to ensure that all of the necessary legal guarantees are put into place to enable political parties to compete with each other. The EU calls on all OSCE participating States to fully implement these commitments.

Equality between women and men is a fundamental value enshrined in the EU Treaties. Mainstreaming equality between women and men in all its activities represents a specific goal for the Union. The existing low representation of women in elected positions creates a democratic deficit and undermines the credibility of institutions; it also highlights the need to reform and restructure the representation and participation of women and men not only to ensure that women's needs and perspectives are reflected in all areas of life, but to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights.

The EU believes that women's political participation is critical in terms of improving democracy and political parties are among the most important institutions affecting women's equal access to and participation in the political process. Therefore, the EU has long emphasised the need for political parties to promote women into leadership positions and recruit women as party candidates, as well as addressing political, economic and social issues of special concern to women.

As Ms Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women said: "If a democracy neglects women's participation, if it ignores women's voices, if it shirks accountability for women's rights, it is a democracy for only half of its citizens."

Political parties play a fundamental role in democracies by contributing to the expression of the political will of the citizens. They can only be effective if the right of peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association are guaranteed. In Copenhagen in 1990 OSCE participating States committed themselves to respect the right of individuals and groups to establish their own political parties or other political organisations. At the same time, regulating political parties insofar as is necessary could contribute to an effective and representative democratic governance.

Finding the right balance between guaranteeing human rights and fundamental freedoms and regulating political parties is an important responsibility of every OSCE participating State and a major challenge in implementing our OSCE commitments at the same time. The Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, developed by ODIHR and the Venice Commission, together with the assistance provided by ODIHR and the Core Group of Experts on Political Party Regulation could contribute to finding this balance and facilitate the implementation of our commitments in this field.

As we could witness just a couple of months ago, new information and communication technologies have far reaching impact on the functioning of civil

society and the entire political system. A well-informed public is a prerequisite for and an engine of democratic processes to work. E-tools could certainly contribute to a better informed and more engaged civil society. They could mobilise and assist underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, increase transparency and access to political process thus strengthen democracy itself.

Therefore the EU welcomes that the OSCE addresses the issue of e-democracy at this year's Human Dimension Seminar and supports that we continue with this discussion on the application and potential of e-democracy in political life in future human dimension events.

Mr Chairman,

The EU is fully committed to the strengthening and the promotion of political pluralism for the above mentioned reasons. EU Member States look forward to engaging with other participating States as well as the representatives of other international and non-governmental organisations in free flowing discussions on this important topic in the days ahead.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA\*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ICELAND\*\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA, GEORGIA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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

\*\*Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and the European Economic Area.