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Statement of the European Union in Response to the Report by the Director of ODIHR

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Strohal back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his report on this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, and on the implementation of the improvements and recommendations concerning election related activities agreed upon in the Ministerial Council Decision 19/06.

The twelfth HDIM fulfilled high expectations, again with record participation and a rich debate that resulted in many useful recommendations. The wide range of side events provided excellent opportunities for further discussions on individual topics brought forward by governments and NGOs.

In our closing statement in Warsaw the EU saluted the representatives of the more than 300 Non Governmental Organizations who took part in the meeting. Their work, often in difficult circumstances, in defending democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, is vital, and unimpeded NGO participation at the HDIM is a unique strength of the OSCE.

Discussions throughout the meeting rightly highlighted the importance of the role of Human Rights defenders and of freedom of Assembly, Association and Expression, for the OSCE region. Current trends in a number of participating States are a cause of concern to the EU. Independent journalists, civic groups

and Human Rights NGOs should be recognized as important contributors to the development of democratic societies. We support further efforts by ODIHR to strengthen cooperation and interaction with civil society, including through its Human Rights Department's focal point for human rights defenders and national human rights institutions. We also strongly support a Ministerial Council decision on Human Rights defenders this year.

Mr Chairman, the issue of free and fair elections was also discussed during the HDIM. We recall that OSCE participating States have freely entered into a number of election related commitments and that their implementation remains essential to guaranteeing genuinely democratic governments. In this regard we recall that some distinct electoral challenges remain to be addressed by OSCE participating states, as highlighted in the 2006 OSCE/ODIHR Director's "Common responsibility" report. We urge participating States to cooperate with ODIHR before, during and after elections, and to implement ODIHR's recommendations on the improvement of their respective electoral systems.

In this context, the EU would like to welcome the remarks Ambassador Strohal just made on the implementation of Ministerial Council Decision 19/06. In his timely report the Director has presented convincing evidence of substantial progress by ODIHR in implementing this Decision. Independence, impartiality and professionalism of ODIHR's election observation has been upheld. The election observation methodology and assistance programmes have been further strengthened, and through an increased number of Needs Assessment Missions and Election Assessment Missions the geographical coverage in ODIHR's election activities has widened. The further diversification of ODIHR's election observation teams is an important undertaking and several EU member states contribute to the voluntary Fund for Diversification. We support the new procedure on recruitment for all EOM positions. The EU continues to fully support ODIHR's election observation activities on the basis of the Copenhagen document of 1990. We are convinced that the measures taken by ODIHR to implement the Ministerial Council Decision 19/06 will further strengthen ODIHR's role as an internationally acknowledged institution for election observation in the OSCE region.

The EU encourages continued partnership between ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, on the basis of the 1997 Cooperation agreement, as has been demonstrated in a number of election observation missions this year.

Ministerial Council Decision 19/06 called on participating States to address deficiencies in the implementation of their commitments and we believe that this remains an area deserving of attention. Ministerial Council Decision 19/06 therefore remains the framework to guide both ODIHR and participating States. As we have previously noted, last year's work on "Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE" was essentially brought to conclusion at the last Ministerial Council in Brussels.

Mr. Chairman, during the HDIM, delegations are encouraged to submit ideas for the following year's human dimension activities. I wish to mention here suggestions the EU made in Warsaw on topics to be discussed in human dimension events next year, namely:

- Human Rights Defenders and Independent National Human Rights Institutions;

- Freedom of Association and Assembly;

- Freedom of Expression, taking into account the 10th anniversary of the creation of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media;

- Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings, with a particular focus on the implementation of existing commitments;

- Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, including a possible exchange of good practices on national institutions responsible for the fight against intolerance;

- Roma and Sinti, with a special emphasis on the review of the implementation of the 2003 Action Plan;

- Freedom of religion and belief, including the relations between secular states and Islam, awareness raising and education, focussing on the current work of ODIHR and the Advisory Panel on freedom of religion and belief;

Gender mainstreaming in all OSCE dimensions; promotion of women's rights including countering all forms of violence against women;

The celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10th December 2008).

In concluding, the EU would like to thank Ambassador Christian Strohal and his dedicated staff for their excellent work in preparing and executing the 2007 HDIM, we wish the Director and his staff all the best as they continue their highly demanding tasks within the Human Dimension.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, 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.