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EUROPE AND HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR PAN-EUROPEAN
CO-OPERATION OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS, AT THE SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN
DIMENSION MEETING ON DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS AND
ELECTION OBSERVATION**

Vienna, 12 and 13 July 2012

**Session II: Election observation and the electoral cycle:
before, during and after election day (with focus on legal framework,
media, campaign finance and gender)**

Mr. Chairperson,

Election observation by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is one of the OSCE's most important and complex activities. Like any complex process, it calls for a responsible and balanced approach, given that both the reputation of the participating State where the Office is carrying out election monitoring and that of the ODIHR itself are at stake.

What is the key to the success of the ODIHR's observation work in the various participating States? The answer is obvious: it is objective and impartial evaluation of elections. This outcome can only be achieved when the toolbox used contains standardized evaluation criteria based on clear and comprehensible rules agreed on and approved in accordance with the OSCE's operating principles, that is, on the basis of consensus. Why there is no such document yet remains an open question. Somebody is trying without any justification whatsoever to interpret the idea of adopting standardized criteria as an attempt to restrict the activities of the ODIHR, but we cannot agree with that point of view. As we see it, adopting standardized criteria would help to regulate the observation process and the preparation of the reports, and to harmonize election evaluation in the various countries in the region. Observation activity is no place for double standards and unfounded conclusions and conjectures, but for the sober language of facts and figures.

Therefore, in the interests of transparent and comprehensible observation, we strongly believe it is necessary to prepare and adopt a standardized code of regulations. We are certain that the participating States would then have far fewer questions for the ODIHR regarding the content of their final election observation reports. The proposals made today on regulating the

ODIHR's election observation activities merit the most careful consideration, especially those put forward by my Kazakh colleague.

We also still have questions on the procedure for deciding on the objectives of the observer missions and the selection of the members of the core team and of long-term OSCE observers, which many participating States of the Organization are excluded from. The ODIHR also has no provision for an open, competitive and geographically balanced procedure for appointing the head of an observer mission and the deputy.

Despite a tendency to expand geographical representation in short-term observer missions in recent years, there is room for improvement in this regard in the composition of the core teams and long-term observer missions.

The work of OSCE/ODIHR missions on the ground is not sufficiently transparent. The process of preparing preliminary statements and the final report and recommendations on the election results remains a cause for concern.

The use of unverified facts and rumours in preparing conclusions and evaluations of the observation results by ODIHR missions is unacceptable.

The political neutrality, impartiality, objective assessment and balanced presentation of information that are basic requirements for the work of any ODIHR election observation mission are frequently disregarded. Exaggerating certain negative facts while remaining silent about obvious positive trends in the electoral process when preparing ODIHR evaluations is also unacceptable. It is even more unacceptable to use the ODIHR conclusions as an instrument for exerting pressure on sovereign States, to draw up all kinds of blacklists and to impose restrictions on the membership of election commissions at various levels. This practice casts a shadow on our Organization and contributes precisely nothing to attaining the goal of developing a security community.

Unfortunately, the idea of conducting a comparative analysis of the election systems and practices in all OSCE participating States has yet to be implemented. It seems such a logical and useful initiative that could provide answers to many questions, and highlight strengths and weaknesses ... But even here we are meeting with incomprehensible opposition. Could this be because certain so-called mature democracies that are so fond of criticizing the tiniest flaws in the electoral systems of other States are themselves the furthest from perfection?

Many OSCE participating States, including Belarus, have consistently supported improving the ODIHR's election observation activities and there is a whole range of concrete proposals on the negotiating table. We stand ready to discuss these in detail with our partners. We hope that many of these ideas will be used as a basis for a draft OSCE Dublin Ministerial Council decision, which would provide an opportunity to optimize and increase the effectiveness of the ODIHR's activities in this area.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.