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German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

2007 Human Dimension Seminar

18 May, Warsaw

Closing statement of the European Union

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

close to the end of this seminar I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the European Union for organizing this important event. Our thanks also go to all those who have prepared or actively participated in this seminar – the keynote speaker and the introducers, the moderators and rapporteurs, delegates from governments and state institutions, non-state participants, representatives of international and regional organisations, the interpreters and everybody else who had a hand in the preparation and holding of this seminar.

Mr. Chairman,

the European Union has listened carefully to the reports provided by the rapporteurs and is looking forward to the consolidated summary of this seminar. We will study this summary with great attention for appropriate follow-up in the Member States of the European Union, and we hope the consolidated summary will facilitate a systematic follow-up on the debates and recommendations of this event in the other participating States as well. The European Union has formulated a number of recommendations that we would like to contribute to the outcome document. Delegations will find these recommendations annexed to this statement which will be circulated both electronically and through the boxes outside the room.

Mr. Chairman, the issues raised during the seminar must not be treated as routine matter. Rather, they form the core of what is defined as democratic norms and values and therefore deserve our utmost attention. Grave deficiencies in democratic participation and representation can undermine and destabilize societies and therefore pose a serious security concern – a concern which in the OSCE concept of comprehensive security is not the matter of the concerned State alone, but a common security concern for the other participating States as well.

We are pleased that once again, this seminar provided the opportunity for civil society representatives and State representatives to meet and discuss freely, if sometimes controversially. We believe that such discourse is an indispensable element of democracy, as is the plurality of views and voices which inevitably comes with democracy. States must respect and protect this plurality. As the German playwright Bertolt Brecht once put it, it is possible to elect another *government*, but electing a new *people* is rather difficult.

With this, Mr. Chairman, let me thank you and all participants and organizers of the seminar once again for the excellent preparation and contributions to this event which we hope will bear fruit in all our countries.

Recommendations

- *To participating States:*

1. Political plurality and diversity are cornerstones of democratic societies. Participating States should respect, protect and promote political plurality, inter alia by granting political parties and individuals the right to exercise legitimate non-violent activities, and should create an environment in which political parties or groups can thrive and operate without fear of reprisal or repression. The freedoms of assembly, association and expression, including the freedom of the media, are of particular relevance in this regard.
2. Participating states should allow criticism of their governments as a sign of a vibrant and functioning democracy. To this end, States should promote a vibrant civil society and allow individuals, such as human rights defenders, to operate freely in their pursuit of non-violent legitimate political activities.
3. Participating States should ensure their legislation regulating the activities of NGOs conforms with OSCE and other international commitments. Legislation should not be used to restrict or intimidate NGOs. ODIHR should give guidance on the implementation of legal frameworks.
4. Political parties should ensure transparent mechanisms of participation and representation of their members and they should themselves be internally democratic.
5. Elections are the most immediate and authentic expression of the political will of the people. Participating States must ensure an electoral process which is in line with OSCE standards and norms, and should seek the expertise and assistance of the ODIHR in this regard.

6. Corruption within the political system undermines participatory democratic processes and decisions and therefore must be fought on all levels, including the local level.
 7. Participation and representation in democratic societies, in particular by women, underrepresented, marginalized or opposition groups and individuals are fundamental in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to and identification with the society as well as the individual's feeling of responsibility. In this context, participating States could consider the Lund recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life.
 8. Participating States should report on follow-up to the Seminar at the 2007 HDIM in Warsaw.
- *To the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights:*
9. ODIHR could compile and assess existing international standards and commitments pertinent to democratic governance, in particular with regard to participation and representation, identify good practices in the implementation of these standards, and assist participating States in the application of these standards.
 10. ODIHR should identify and disseminate good practices of exchanges between political parties and civil society.
 11. Democracy is a complex process where external election monitoring can significantly contribute to improving the electoral, and thereby the democratic process. ODIHR should continue to take account of developments in its election observation activities in order to further assist participating States in the conduct of elections in this regard.

12. E-voting and the conduct of referenda are areas to which the ODIHR could devote attention.

The Candidate Country Turkey, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Serbia, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this statement.