



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

ODIHR and Democratic Governance

OSCE participating States “recognize that human rights are best respected in democratic societies, where decisions are taken with maximum transparency and broad participation.”
(Helsinki, 2008)

What is Democratic Governance?

Democratic governance is the bedrock of the OSCE’s system of values and standards. It is a system of government where institutions function according to democratic processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions.

Why is the OSCE involved?

ODIHR’s work on democratic governance is anchored in the commitments the OSCE participating States have agreed to uphold. These commitments include gender equality, political pluralism, institutional accountability and responsiveness, an active civil society, human rights, the rule of law, and democratic elections.

In Paris in 1990, OSCE participating States committed to “undertake to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations.”

ODIHR supports the efforts of participating States to improve democratic governance by increasing the level of women’s participation in politics, strengthening parliaments, developing multi-party political landscapes and following up on recommendations made by election observation missions. In many of these activities, ODIHR works in partnership with local civil society organizations, encouraging them to contribute actively to debates on democratic governance.



How does ODIHR work on Democratic Governance?

Parliamentary support

OSCE participating States recognize the importance of “a form of government that is representative in character, in which the executive is accountable to the elected legislature or the electorate.” (Copenhagen, 1990)

The OSCE assists parliaments to ensure that they are able to perform their role effectively. ODIHR supports field operations by providing advice and expertise in the area of parliamentary strengthening, parliamentary ethics and codes of conduct. ODIHR produced the *Background Study: Professional and Ethical Standards for Parliamentarians* as a comprehensive, but practical, publication that analyses how to build and reform systems that set professional and ethical standards for Members of Parliament.

Recognizing the importance of gender equality in elected office, ODIHR also supports participating States to strengthen women’s parliamentary representation. In its *Comparative Study on Parliamentary Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region*, ODIHR identifies the wide range of parliamentary

structures that have been established to promote gender equality and women’s substantive representation in parliament, and provides practical guidance on how to maximize their impact.

ODIHR also partners with *Agora*, an international online database of information and good practices to strengthen parliaments, in its efforts to provide advice and expertise to parliamentarians, as well as sharing knowledge and networking tools.

Developing multi-party political landscapes

In Copenhagen in 1990, OSCE participating States agreed to, “respect the right of individuals and groups to establish, in full freedom, their own political parties or other political organizations and provide such political parties and organizations with the necessary legal guarantees to enable them to compete with each other on a basis of equal treatment before the law and by the authorities.”

Pluralism with regard to political organizations and clear separation between the State and political parties are key features of good democratic governance. One of ODIHR’s objectives is to support participating States in fully institutionalizing multi-party systems and to ensure that all political parties work to preserve



this system, regardless of the party in power. Well designed and properly enforced laws and regulations on political parties help create an environment in which parties can most effectively perform their essential democratic functions. ODIHR also assists authorities in building transparent and accountable party funding systems.

ODIHR developed and published with the Council of Europe's Venice Commission *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation*, to provide guidance for the drafting and implementation of legislation and regulations on political parties. The guidelines provide an overview of good practices that can be applied across the entire range of democratic systems in the OSCE region.

Support to civil society and think tanks

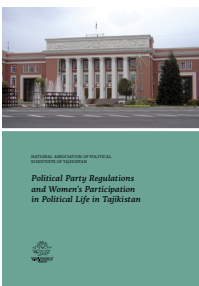
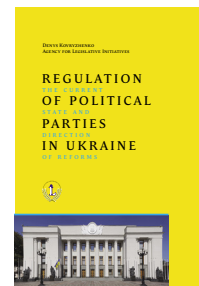
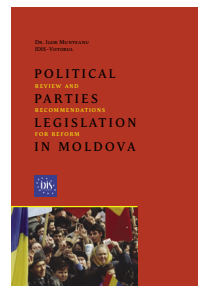
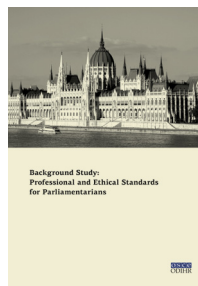
In Astana in 2010 participating States committed to “value the important role played by civil society and free media in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms [and] democracy”. Recognizing the importance of civil society organizations, ODIHR works to strengthen and maximize their contributions to policy- and decision-making.

ODIHR facilitates an ongoing dialogue among civil society organizations to strengthen their

interactions with participating States. ODIHR also supports the creation and development of civil society networks active throughout the OSCE region.

ODIHR has worked with think tanks in a number of countries to produce reports on the challenges of building a multi-party system in a given country. The reports provide recommendations on how to overcome such challenges by reforming legislation and regulations governing political parties.

Co-operation with civil society is also crucial to the success of ODIHR's activities on promoting gender equality and women's participation in political and public life.



Partnerships

The OSCE and the Council of Europe agreed to co-operate at an operational level in the development of effective, democratic local government in South-Eastern Europe. Within the framework of this agreement, ODIHR works closely with OSCE field operations in developing co-operation with the Council of Europe on specific local government initiatives.

Across the OSCE region, ODIHR works with a range of partners to foster democratic governance. Our partners include:

- Participating States — specifically national parliaments and political party regulators;
- Civil society organizations, think tanks and political parties; and
- International organizations — OSCE field operations, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, international party institutes, party foundations, the Council of Europe Venice Commission, the Group of States Against Corruption and UN agencies.

More information

For detailed information about ODIHR's democratic governance initiatives and to view its full range of resources and publications, please visit <http://www.osce.org/odihr/demgov>

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