



**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on  
Promotion of Pluralism in New Media**

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Ms. Chairperson,  
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The topic under discussion at this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting today is not only vital to issues of media freedom and pluralism; it also contributes to a growing discourse in other fields of the OSCE's work. The Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) is, of course, the leading institution of the OSCE in dealing with almost all media freedom issues, but ODIHR often takes RFoM expertise and analysis into account when doing its own work under its specific mandate to deal with media issues in context of elections.

The ODIHR methodology for the observation of elections has long considered media freedom and pluralism to be a fundamental element of genuine and fair elections. This was formalized at the Budapest summit in 1994, which recognized that elections are not just about the day itself, but a longer term process that should take into account conditions before, during, and after an election day. On the basis of the mandate established at that time, ODIHR delineated a concrete methodology to "assess the conditions for the free and independent functioning of the media", as

defined in Budapest. This methodology has been utilized throughout the course of election observation over that last decade and a half.

At that time, the main source of information for voters in most OSCE participating States was broadcast media, both televised and radio. The importance of print media was also recognized and, thus, monitoring of all of these media facets was factored into the ODIHR election methodology, producing both qualitative and quantitative results on the basis of which to assess this 'free and independent functioning of media' in context of elections.

In most OSCE participating States, these main media formats continue to provide the main sources of information for the majority of the OSCE area's citizens. Yet the new media formats that have burgeoned over the last years have thrown up a number of interesting questions that pertain particularly to the conduct of elections. To what extent is new media relevant as a campaigning platform for pluralistic political voices and opinions within societies, to what degree has new media penetrated OSCE societies as a viable alternative format of information, to what extent does it provide voters with the possibility of direct, unfiltered access to political voices otherwise often hard to reach (as well as the reverse), and ultimately how to monitor and assess the impact of new media such as the Internet and social media upon a political electoral process.

Other elements of new media present methodological challenges as well. The line of argument in the 90's with regard to broadcast media was that due to limited bandwidth and issues of allocation, broadcast media and particularly state-owned or public media which was funded from the public purse had particular obligations of equity or equality during electoral processes. With the digitalization of broadcast media and its unlimited technical features, the role of the state in promoting media plurality, de-regulating broadcast media regimes, and presenting only limited barriers to entry are all questions that need to be fully considered. The onus to allow a real plurality of voices within a society to emerge without hiding behind the argument of technical difficulties really comes to the forefront of States' responsibility. It also raises the question of whether self-regulatory regimes that are applied in print media sectors, which have traditionally been more tolerant of opinionated discourse, may now also be applicable in a digitalized broadcast framework.

These are all questions that the ODIHR election department is interested in and actively following. The aim is to improve our methodology to take into account the complexities of all forms of media, including these new media changes. And as always with the explicit goal of assisting the

OSCE participating States in meeting their own freely undertaken obligations to hold democratic election in line with OSCE commitments. We will be, thus, following the discussions carefully and are very much interested in the dialogue that will result. I, therefore, wish everyone a very productive and fruitful session.