

**OSCE - Mediterranean Partner Countries' Civil Society Conference  
Ahead of the 2011 Vilnius Ministerial Council**

**Electoral Good Practice, Political Participation, Justice and Legal  
Reform**

**Vilnius, Lithuania, 4-5 December 2011**

**ANNOTATED AGENDA**

**I. OVERVIEW**

The Civil Society Conference for Mediterranean Partners, on the eve of the Ministerial Council in Vilnius on 4-5 December, organized by the OSCE Chairmanship and OSCE/ODIHR will bring together civil society representatives from OSCE Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation countries with civil society representatives from OSCE participating States. The event will build on the OSCE's mandate and experience of encouraging international co-operation among civil society groups, to encourage new links and partnerships between civil society representatives in OSCE states and in the Mediterranean partner States, at a time of rapid change and transition in this region.

The OSCE has developed a strong track record in facilitating international contacts among civil society groups on issues regarding the human dimension of security. In this, it has been guided by the commitment expressed in Par. 26 of the Copenhagen Document of 1990, in which participating States agreed to "encourage, facilitate, and where appropriate, support practical endeavours and the sharing of information, ideas, and expertise among themselves and by direct contacts and co-operation between individuals, groups and organizations" in a variety of areas concerning democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law. The OSCE and ODIHR's projects and programmes focused on strengthening civil society, as well as the annual human dimension meetings, in which civil society fully participate, are just two examples of how the OSCE has put this commitment into practice.

The political changes in some countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) during the course of 2011 have shown the importance of civil society as a driver of political change and reform. As a number of states engage in difficult reform processes, the challenge for MENA civil society will be to maintain and increase their contribution to political and public life, and to keep up the pace of reform. Through its links with several MENA countries as OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, the OSCE is in an

ideal position to step up its support for and engagement in this region, and can serve as a platform to develop a valuable exchange of experiences among civil society groups from the OSCE region and those in the Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation states. Furthermore, the central role played by civil society in OSCE structures and processes, gives the organization a unique level of access to civil society groups. Civil society groups from Central and Eastern Europe as well as Central Asia in particular may offer valuable lessons and recommendations from their experiences of recent democratic transitions in their own societies.

Three areas in particular stand out as being of particular relevance in the context of political transition, and where the future evolution of the countries' political systems is at stake. Firstly, analysts of the situation have noted the challenge of ensuring the continued engagement of civil society, women and youth – three groups that played a particularly prominent role in the events of 2011 – in the emerging democratic processes of the MENA countries, amid fears that these groups are being excluded in the reform process. Secondly, channeling the reform momentum into genuinely improved and democratic electoral legal frameworks and practices will also require sustained attention from civil society to monitor the process. Thirdly, justice and legal reform is a broad area where civil society – through advocacy for legal and judicial reform – can significantly affect and increase the quality and pace of change.

In all three areas, the OSCE/ODIHR has the capacity and experience to facilitate substantive and relevant discussions among key civil society actors from both the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partner countries. The format for such an event builds on the tradition of civil society fora ahead of major OSCE meetings, with the aim to foster the engagement of civil society and increase exchanges with participating States.

## **II. AIMS**

The conference will aim to:

- Promote an exchange of good practices and experiences among civil society groups in the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation countries with civil society groups in the OSCE region. These exchanges would address the challenges of sustainable democratization and reform in the area of electoral administration frameworks, political participation (particularly of women and youth), and judicial and legal reform;
- Generate recommendations from civil society to OSCE participating States meeting in the Vilnius Ministerial Council on possible future OSCE engagement with the Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation countries, in particular as relates to civil society;
- Permit the OSCE and its institutions to gain a greater awareness of the needs of civil society in the Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation countries, in order to better shape possible future support programmes;
- Increase awareness among Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation civil society representatives of existing international and OSCE standards, institutions and programmes, as well as tools and practices developed by the OSCE in the area of democratic elections, political participation, fair trials and access to justice, and transparent and effective law-making that results in better regulation.

### III. CONFERENCE LOGISTICS

The Conference will be held on 4-5 December 2011, in Vilnius, Lithuania.

**Civil Society Fair:** Participants may set up promotional materials for the lunchtime Civil Society Fair from 17:00-19:00 on Saturday 3 December, and on Sunday 4 December from 8:00-9:00 as well as during the lunch breaks themselves.

### IV. WORK PLAN

*Saturday, 3 December 2011*

**19:00 – 21:00 Opening Buffet Dinner**  
**Crowne Plaza Hotel**

*Sunday, 4 December 2011*

**8:00 – 9:30 Registration of participants**

**9:30 – 10:00 Introduction and Opening Remarks**

*Evaldas Ignatavicius, on behalf of the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania*

*Douglas Wake, Deputy Director OSCE/ODIHR*

*Keynote Speaker: Achref Aouadi (Tunisia) – Founder, I-Watch*

*Keynote Speaker: Sonja Lokar (Slovenia), Executive Director of the Central and Eastern Europe Network for Gender Issues*

*Yuri Dzhibladze (Russia), Organizing Committee, OSCE Ministerial Conference Parallel Civil Society Forum*

**10:00 - 11:00 Session I (Break out into Working Groups)**

Working Group I: 'Electoral good practice and lessons learned'	Working Group II: 'Political participation (including gender)'	Working Group III: 'Justice and Legal Reform'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Information on OSCE commitments and ODIHR experiences</i></li><li>- <i>OSCE civil society experiences</i></li></ul>		

**11:15 - 11:30 Coffee Break**

**11:30 – 12:30 Session I (Continued – in Working Groups)**

Working Group I: ‘Electoral good practice and lessons learned’	Working Group II: ‘Political participation (including gender)’	Working Group III: ‘Justice and Legal Reform’
<i>- Experiences of civil society in Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation countries</i>		

**12:30 – 14:00 Buffet Lunch and Civil Society Fair**

**14:00 – 15:30 Session II (In Working Groups)**

Working Group I: ‘Electoral good practice and lessons learned’	Working Group II: ‘Political participation (including gender)’	Working Group III: ‘Justice and Legal Reform’
<i>- Discussion of civil society needs and challenges in Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation states</i> <i>- Discussion of how ODIHR/OSCE can increase engagement with civil society in Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation countries</i>		

**15:30 – 15:45 Coffee Break**

**15:45 – 17:00 Session II (Continued)**

Working Group I: ‘Electoral good practice and lessons learned’	Working Group II: ‘Political participation (including gender)’	Working Group III: ‘Justice and Legal Reform’
<i>- Discussion and preparation of recommendations</i>		

**18:00 – 21:00 Reception Chairmanship in Office - Restaurant "Horizontas", Top Floor, Hotel Crown Plaza**

*Monday 5 December 2011*

**9:00 – 10:30 Special Side Event: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in Democratic Transition**

**10:30-11:00 Coffee break**

**11:00 – 13:15 Session III (In Working Groups)**

Working Group I: ‘Electoral good practice and lessons learned’	Working Group II: ‘Political participation (including gender)’	Working Group III: ‘Justice and Legal Reform’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Wrap up from previous day’s discussions, led by co-moderators</i></li><li>- <i>Final preparations for presentation of recommendations in the Closing Session</i></li></ul>		

**13:15 – 13:30 Coffee Break**

**13:30 – 14:30 Session IV (Closing Session)**

- Co-moderators present recommendations developed by each Working Group

*Closing Speakers:*

*Douglas Wake, Deputy Director, OSCE/ODIHR*

*Achref Aouadi (Tunisia) – Founder, I-Watch*

**14:30 – 16:00 Buffet Lunch and Civil Society Fair**

**19:00 Reception – Mayor of Vilnius - City Hall, Didzioji 31 (Old Town)**

## V. ORGANIZATION: DETAILED DESCRIPTION

After the Introduction and Opening Remarks, participants will break out into three thematic Working Groups, which will meet in parallel. The Working Groups will have the following themes:

- Working Group I: *‘Electoral Good Practice and Lessons Learned’*
- Working Group II: *‘Political Participation’*
- Working Group III: *‘Justice and Legal Reform’*

In addition, a **Special Side Event on “Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in Democratic Transition”** for interested participants will be held on Monday 5 December from 9:00 to 10:30.

For detailed descriptions of the **Working Groups**, please see section VI below.

The Working Groups will meet in parallel. Participants will be asked to stay within **one** thematic Working Group throughout **Sessions I-III** of the conference. In these Working Groups, they will have the opportunity to raise issues, identify trends, present good practices, and exchange information. To be effective, the organizers will aim to limit participation in each Working Group at 25 participants.

Each Working Group will be co-moderated by two civil society groups, one from the OSCE region, and one from a Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation country. Co-moderators will lead discussions, take note of conclusions and take the lead in preparing draft recommendations. These recommendations will then be submitted for discussion and agreement within the Working Group in Session III on 5 December.

In **Session I**, each Working Group will start with an introduction by ODIHR or an ODIHR-associated expert, covering the essential elements of the OSCE institutional framework, as well as its commitments and programmes in the thematic area under discussion. Following that, civil society groups from the OSCE area and from Mediterranean Partner States will present their experiences to the Working Group. Moving into **Session II**, participants will be encouraged to discuss the opportunities and challenges in their countries and regions. Civil society groups will be able to discuss how they can contribute to meaningful reform in their fields. The recommendations for the plenary session on 5 December should be considered in Session II as well.

**During Session III**, all participants will meet again in their Working Groups to wrap up discussions from the previous day and to discuss the recommendations which the co-moderators will present to Session IV.

In **Session IV**, all participants will reconvene in a plenary format, and will hear the conclusions and recommendations of each **Working Group**, as presented by the co-moderators. Following this, during Session IV, participants will hear closing remarks and reflections from the selected key note speakers.

During the lunch hours on both days of the conference, participants are encouraged to take part in the **Civil Society Fair**, at which organizations may set up stalls and distribute materials from their organizations, and participants can informally meet and learn about each others’ work and initiatives. Preparations for the Civil Society Fair will

take place during the registration period. In addition, the conference will include special evening **receptions** for the participants to meet OSCE participating States delegates in Vilnius for the Ministerial.

## **VI. WORKING GROUP DESCRIPTIONS**

### ***Working Group 1: ‘Electoral good practice and lessons learned’***

Drawing upon its observation experience within the OSCE region, OSCE/ODIHR developed a series of handbooks that could be useful for domestic observer groups in Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. During the first part of the session, participants will learn about ODIHR’s experience. This will include brief overviews of:

- (1) The importance of good electoral practice in the broader context of democratic governance,
- (2) OSCE commitments and international standards for democratic elections as well as international good practice, and
- (3) How observation can lead to greater transparency and deter electoral malpractice including possible fraud.

ODIHR will also briefly introduce its electoral law review experience, leading to an interactive discussion on possible interventions to improve electoral practices in the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. Participants from OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation are encouraged to elaborate on their experiences and advise on what has worked best in their countries to improve electoral processes. Participants could further discuss recommendations for the way forward including, for example, how best to exchange information and to learn from each others’ experiences in the future.

### ***Working Group 2: ‘Political participation (including gender)’***

This session will focus on activities that aim to increase the participation of citizens – in particular civil society, women, and youth – in the democratic process, in order to enrich democratic life. In particular, participants will consider how civil society can ensure that governments are representative, responsive, and accountable.

The development of multi-party landscapes and political pluralism requires that citizens are able to have input into political life, particularly through political parties, politically-active civil society organizations, parliaments, and other representative bodies. Special emphasis will be placed on strengthening the capacity of civil society to promote women’s participation in political and public life. The session will also recall the OSCE commitments and the OSCE/ODIHR’s work in this area. OSCE/ODIHR tools and materials will be presented and featured, including the study *Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan*. The session will serve to exchange and present experiences, discuss strategies and initiatives taken by civil society across the OSCE region that have proven successful in promoting reform of democratic institutions and political participation. Increasing the number and role of women in political processes through policy research institutions, think tanks, and women’s organizations will be discussed in particular. A discussion on how good practices from the OSCE region can be relevant for the Mediterranean context will follow and may serve as the basis for recommendations by participants to policy makers.

### ***Working Group 3: 'Justice and Legal Reform'***

This session will consider judicial and legal reform processes by introducing them to OSCE/ODIHR tools such as the OSCE/ODIHR-Venice Commission *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly* and the *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation*, the legal database [www.legislationline.org](http://www.legislationline.org), and activities in the area of trial monitoring, judicial independence, and legal reform. The session will focus on methodologies and tools civil society actors from the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation could use to advocate for judicial and legal reform, and include an exchange of experience and good practices from within the OSCE region. The Session will also discuss the importance of guaranteeing freedom of peaceful assembly, as well as tools for monitoring freedom of assembly.

Trial monitoring as a tool to assess justice sector reforms in countries that undergo political transition will be presented based on the OSCE/ODIHR methodology developed with OSCE Field Operations and by way of an expert presentation. The session will also focus on the role civil society actors can play in promoting judicial independence, based on the *Kyiv Recommendations on Judicial Independence*. Based on case studies within the OSCE region, a discussion on their relevance for the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation will be held.

A discussion on the importance of transparent public consultations with civil society in legal and constitutional reform processes will follow, with a focus on reform of legislation on freedom of assembly, freedom of association, political parties, and the judiciary. The session will explore potential tools for civil society to participate in the law-making process and form the basis for an exchange of experience and best practice between civil society from the OSCE region and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation.