



Permanent Mission  
of the Federal Republic of Germany  
to the OSCE  
Vienna



Germany 2007 – Presidency of the European Union

HDS.DEL/04/07  
16 May 2007

## German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

### **2007 Human Dimension Seminar**

**16 May, Warsaw**

## Opening statement of the European Union

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address the opening session of the 2007 OSCE Human Dimension Seminar on behalf of the European Union. Let me first thank the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for hosting this meeting here in the city of Warsaw, where the Office has its headquarters. The European Union welcomes the opportunity provided by this seminar to exchange information and discuss effective participation and representation in democratic societies, an issue which is of equal importance to all OSCE participating States.

As is customary, representatives of all OSCE participating states, international organizations and non-governmental organizations have been invited to attend the seminar. The meeting should provide an open forum for important issues, including difficult and controversial ones, to be discussed between Governments and civil society. The member States of the European Union will engage constructively in this.

One of the fundamental preconditions for effective participation and representation in democratic societies is the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as defined in the body of OSCE commitments and international law. Of crucial importance in this context are the fundamental rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression – which include, in practical terms, the right to form

political groups or parties or engage as individuals in the political process, as well as the right to articulate political and other views in an open and permissive environment.

The European Union welcomed the extensive discussion on freedom of assembly, association and expression at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in March in Vienna and hopes to build on that debate during this seminar. The practical implementation of the commitments in these areas is a permanent endeavour for all democracies, both established and emerging. We believe that ODIHR's Guidelines on the Right to Peaceful Assembly can be a helpful tool for participating States in drafting relevant legislation and in the application of this legislation.

One important component of the freedom of expression is the freedom of the media, which must be guaranteed not only by law, but also administratively on a day-to-day basis. The European Union considers media independence and pluralism as fundamental to any functioning democracy and free society and therefore to the effective participation in democratic societies. We call on all participating States to create an environment where the media can work freely, effectively and without fear, and contribute to a truly open, participatory and pluralistic political discourse.

Effective participation and representation in democratic societies requires a climate in which civil society can thrive and be an integral part of the political process. After all, political parties *are* creations of civil society, as are freely elected Parliaments which should represent the will of the people at large. Non-governmental organisations and individuals should enjoy the right to articulate their views and engage in the political process freely and without fear of reprisal or repression. This is of particular relevance for representatives of minorities and under-represented or marginalized groups. We believe - as a lesson from history - that political systems will be most sustainable when they are inclusive of those who do not belong to the mainstream of society.

The ability of human rights defenders to operate freely is of particular importance, as is their protection by the State from violent attacks or other forms of repression or intimidation. Human rights defenders have been a motor of societal and political

development in the entire OSCE area since the beginning of the Helsinki process. All OSCE participating States owe a great deal to these courageous individuals, without whom we would not have achieved the standards to which our 56 sovereign participating States are committed today. We believe that the protection and promotion of human rights defenders continues to need our urgent attention, both at this seminar and at future OSCE meetings.

OSCE participating States recognised in Copenhagen in 1990 “that the will of the people, freely and fairly expressed through periodic and genuine elections, is the basis of the authority and legitimacy of all government.” For the EU, this principle remains at the very core of guaranteeing true participatory democracy. In 1990 the participating States also agreed to set up the Office for Free Elections, now the ODIHR. The ODIHR has since developed expertise in assisting States in the implementation of election-related commitments, and its methodology for election observation has positioned the OSCE at the forefront of international observer efforts. EU Member States remain welcome recipients of ODIHR’s expert advice and assistance and strong supporters of its work in observation which can reinforce the electorate’s confidence in the electoral process, thus contributing substantially to the democratic process.

Mr. Chairman, the second theme of this seminar is “effective *representation* in democratic societies”. From what we have said, it follows that effective *representation* is the flip side of the coin of effective *participation*. Representation – at the local, regional, or national level – may take many forms, including non-parliamentary forms. But the common denominator is that the conditions to articulate a political position or will and engage in the political process, whether in formal politics or in a less formal and more independent setting, must be preserved, protected and promoted in all our countries. One of the lessons of OSCE history is that States and societies have fared best when these conditions were in place.

Mr. Chairman, let me thank ODIHR once again for organizing this meeting. We are looking forward to engaging with the participating States in discussions on this important topic in the days ahead.

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

---

\* Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.