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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 11-22 September 2017

Working session 4 and 5: Ensuring equal enjoyment of rights and equal participation in political and public life

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Equal and effective participation in political and public life is critical for democracy, the rule of law, social inclusion, economic development, gender equality, and for the realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

At the same time, those very rights – inter alia to freedom of expression, to peaceful assembly, to freedom of association, to education, and access to information - are among the essential conditions for equal participation in political and public affairs, and must be promoted and protected.

However, many citizens continue to face obstacles, such as discrimination, including multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, in the enjoyment of their right to participate in political and public life as well as in the enjoyment of other human rights that enable it. Women, persons belonging to marginalized groups or minorities, and persons in vulnerable situations are among those who are most affected by discrimination in political and public affairs.

The 1991 Moscow Document commits OSCE participating States to promote equal opportunity for full and equal participation of women and men in all aspects of political and public life and decision-making processes. It recognizes that women's representation is not an end itself, but a condition of development towards a more representative democracy and a more productive and socially equitable society and state. Although significant advances have been made in this respect, women continue to be under-represented in public institutions,



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particularly in decision-making positions at all levels. Women's representation in parliaments in the OSCE region now stands at an average of 25 per cent which remains insufficient; in addition there is a wide variation among participating States with regard to implementation of commitments on gender equality and political participation of women.

In the field of peace and security, the UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) calls for full and equal participation of women in decision making with regard to conflict prevention, in post-conflict reconstruction, as well as in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Furthermore, the UN Security Council resolution 2242 renewed the call on regional organizations to work on the inclusion of women in peace and security issues.

The 1991 Moscow Document also commit participating States to ensure the protection of the human rights of persons with disabilities and their equal opportunity to participate fully in the life of their society. Obstacles in accessing data, legal and administrative barriers, inaccessible processes and information, and a lack of awareness about political rights can deny persons with disabilities the opportunity to participate in political and public life.

Enhancing participation in public and political life stands at the core of the OSCE commitments pertaining to Roma and Sinti persons. The Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti persons within the OSCE Area, later reinforced with two Ministerial Council Decisions on enhancing its implementation, also calls on the participating States to promote effective participation of Roma and Sinti persons in public and political life, with particular attention to the effective and equal participation of Roma and Sinti women.

In many OSCE States, we witness a general decline in traditional forms of political participation (declining voter turnout, low rates of youth membership in political parties) which runs parallel to youth disengagement from politics. One key challenge is to ensure that youth remains politically engaged and feel empowered within the framework of existing democratic institutions, as well as within new forms of on-line political participation. Furthermore the UN Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth Peace and Security, urges to consider ways



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to increase inclusive participation of youth in the decision making at all levels for the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

Finally, the EU commends the efforts of ODIHR in providing technical support as a means of assisting participating States to comply with OSCE commitments regarding equal enjoyment of rights and equal participation in political and public life.

Recommendations

We would like to present the following recommendations to the OSCE and to the participating States:

- Ensure equal enjoyment of rights and equal participation of women, persons belonging to marginalized groups or minorities, persons with disabilities and persons in vulnerable situations, including young persons, to participate in political and public life, including through identifying and eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices.
- Support policies, initiatives and effective measures that promote non-discrimination, inclusiveness and equal access to opportunities, including access to education and training.
- Strengthen regional coordination in efforts to implement the Women, Peace and Security resolutions, including by developing an OSCE- Wide Action Plan on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
- Enhance the OSCE's focus on supporting implementation of UNSCR 1325 and its follow-on resolutions, including through tailored assistance to participating states in development and implementation of national action plans on women, peace and security.



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- Continue to implement the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area as well as Ministerial Council Decisions 6/08 and 4/13, including by addressing practical obstacles to enhanced public and political participation of Roma and Sinti persons, paying particular attention to the effective and equal participation of Roma and Sinti women.
- Find proactive ways to enhance youth political participation and activism, including via new forms of on-line political participation, the inclusion of youth perspective into the political debate and a strengthened role of youth in the promotion of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.