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Working session 15: Democratic institutions, including

Democratic elections

Warsaw, 3 October 2012

Statement by the Delegation of Switzerland

Madam Chair,

Positions of participating States on electoral observations have not changed much in the past years: Some participating States advocate for a binding framework which would include a detailed methodology for election observation. Other participating States are in favor of introducing a structured follow-up process to ODIHR recommendations and assessments after election observations.

We therefore propose to focus on finding paths with a potential to lead to consensual outcomes:

- More than two decades after the Copenhagen Document time is ripe to complement existing commitments regarding *standards for democratic elections*, so that they reflect the experience gained and how election issues have recently evolved. We recommend selecting a

thematic, not politicized entry point for discussions, such as updating commitments that correspond to the introduction of new voting technologies. (The bottom line of such reflections, however, has to be clear from the outset, namely that existing standards are to be consolidated, not lowered.)

- When it comes to *the principles of electoral observation*, they are contained in MC Decision 19/06 (Brussels) and consist of “independence, impartiality and professionalism”. Switzerland favors a systematic exchange on methodological questions regarding election observation aiming at strengthening those principles.
 - Such an exchange could be based on identifying commonalities and differences between the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observers*, and the *Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*, and the *Guidelines for Election and Referenda for International Observers of the Commonwealth of Independent States* (2011). Following this approach, we might be able to deepen mutual trust by reaching a common understanding on a revised Code of Conduct for Election Observers.
 - Looking into more technical requests which have been brought forward by participating States recently and provided that we manage to mobilize some extra-budgetary resources, ODIHR could be asked to compile a study analyzing the election legislation in the OSCE countries and/or collect and publish thematic good practices based on its experience. Eventually, such a best practice collection of ODIHR
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could be compared with those of other international or regional organizations.

- As regards the follow-up to recommendations on election observation, we would propose to promote a structured, but voluntary process, such as the voluntary reporting in the Human Dimension Committee. We do not expect that participating States at such an occasion announce the full implementation of all recommendations given. What we expect is a reflection on how participating States deal with the recommendations, on their practices and on challenges they face in the follow-up process. In addition to that, ODIHR could be invited to do follow-up visits a certain time period after the publication of the final report to discuss the recommendations with major (national) stakeholders (government authorities and civil society).
- Switzerland is ready to discuss methods of electoral observation. This said, Switzerland will not accept any lowering of the standards, nor interferences into assessments pronounced by independent institutions.

Madam Chair,

Finally, let me stress once more the importance of maintaining the high credibility enjoyed by OSCE election observation missions, for whom we are particularly indebted to the thorough methodology developed by ODIHR, and consisting in observing before, during and after elections. As we have seen on numerous occasions, election observation missions are at their best when based on a truly cooperative partnership between

the participating institutions benefiting entirely from their respective strengths. We fully understand the respective roles of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. It is our hope that turf and conflicts can be overcome to ensure that the credibility of the OSCE is not affected. This is in our common interest and we strongly believe in it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.
