

**OSCE Human Dimension Seminar 2011: The Role of Political Parties in the
Political Process**

Warsaw, 18-20 May 2011

Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship closing remarks

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank participants, experts and moderators for an excellent Human Dimension Seminar, thank all those who supported the participation of others; thank in particular the OSCE ODIHR for their logistical and substantive support to the event.

Secondly, I would like to offer some closing thoughts and reflections on the Seminar. I would like to reiterate once again that this is the first time that the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar has had a title which refers to “the role of political parties in the political process”.

The Seminar has shown that political parties and the “importance of pluralism with regard to political organizations” (Copenhagen, 1990) are at the very heart of the OSCE’s understanding of its commitments. The OSCE’s commitments provide very clear standards of the common values that this organization has in the field of political parties and pluralism. This is an area where the OSCE can and should make a difference.

In the last 20 years - there has been great progress in many of our participating States in advancing political pluralism and multi-party democracy. Indeed, speaking from a Lithuanian point of view, it is amazing to consider the change that two decades has brought – from a one party to a multi-party state. But this Seminar has shown that there are some remaining challenges in securing compliance with the commitments to which we all adhered.

In session one, we learnt that a pledge to protect political pluralism runs through the heart of these commitments, and that pluralism needs to be protected in various ways. One of these is to guarantee the neutrality of the state when it comes to multi-party competition – the state and its administrative resources should not be used to pursue the victory of one party. We need to think more about how such abuses can be prevented, monitored, and if necessary, punished. As OSCE participating States we should think about the way our laws and institutions protect and advance pluralism.

This Seminar has also developed our understanding of why political parties are crucial to advancing the equality of women and men in the political process and public office. Political parties, as the key mechanisms through which citizens achieve elected office, should be seen as “gate-keepers” for women’s participation. Too often, women find it more difficult to rise in the party ranks, and as a consequence, institutions with elected members are often dominated by men. We have learned of a wide variety of measures – both voluntary and legally mandated – that can improve this imbalance. We, as OSCE participating States, need to devote more attention to this issue, both in the OSCE and in our national political systems, to right this problem. The OSCE institutions and field operations’ valuable work in this area needs to be supported and expanded, in particular to provide assistance and expertise in this field.

We considered the importance of political party regulation and legislation – this is indeed a fundamental element in translating the political commitments to protect and foster pluralism into the reality of national law. In this regard, let me underline how useful and valuable the new ODIHR/Venice Commission *Guidelines for Political Party Regulation* are for participating States, and in particular law drafters, legislators, regulators, and civil society. Participating States should call on ODIHR – and its deep expertise in the matter – if and when they are planning to update or draft regulations on political parties. Beyond that, the importance of transparent, fair, equal, neutral and objective administration of political party regulations should not be underestimated. One area where the OSCE – in particular its institutions – might want to focus its efforts in future is the area of political party financing: how it affects pluralism, trust in institutions, the participation of women, as well as connections with the problem of corruption.

Lithuania has a special Law regulating the funding of political parties and political campaigns and control over funding.

Political parties are funded from donations of natural and legal persons, membership fees and state budget. There are limits of donations from one person and limits of political campaign expenditure.

The public funding is a very important source of funding of political parties, last year it was about 58% of all income of political parties. The possibility to get the funding from state budget and protecting good reputation, especially before elections, stimulate political parties to comply with Law more effectively than fines.

The Central Electoral Commission takes a leading role in the control over funding of political parties and political campaigns. The Commission receives documents

and reports from both political parties and political campaign participants about incomes, including donations, and expenditures.

The participants of political campaign submit the Commission the information on the received donations and donors within ten working days from receiving the donation. The political parties, on their routine activity, submit such information within ten working days after the end of a quarter.

Before elections the Central Electoral Commission receives declarations from media and monitoring groups about political advertising.

After elections we receive the political campaign funding statements from participants, reports on political advertising from participants, media and monitoring groups, the auditor's reports *on findings* about funding statements.

All these groups (political parties, participants of political campaign, media, monitoring groups) work on-line with our information system, so this information is published on our website immediately.

Before elections everybody may access and analyze mostly full information about donors of political campaign participants and information about political advertising received from media and monitoring groups.

Lithuania shares the experience in control over political funding with other countries and various organizations.

Now we implement the recommendations of the third GRECO evaluation round which addresses the transparency of party funding.

The Central Electoral Commission is a member of The Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO) which, like ODIHR, celebrates 20 years anniversary this summer.

Speaking from a Lithuanian perspective, I can underline that the introduction of a public funding system helped to strengthen our multi-party system. Further

consideration needs to be given in an OSCE context to public funding models as mechanisms for advancing pluralism.

In our last working session, we had a chance to explore the potential for online and information technologies to transform the way our democracies function, advancing participation, and increasing transparency. To illustrate this from a Lithuanian perspective - we were one of the first countries to introduce an online disclosure for candidate financial statements, greatly increasing the transparency of our democratic process and making enforcement and compliance easier.

Organizing elections we use technologies in other areas too, like a possibility to print voter's poll card on the website of the CEC, receiving and publishing voting results on the night of elections. During the municipal elections this year, first time candidates could submit application documents on-line (in parallel, signed hard copies of the documents were required), voters could express their support for self-nomination of a candidate, political parties could appoint their representatives to electoral commissions and election observers. All these tools make the election's process more transparent and help to involve more citizens to political processes.

Let us think about how to widen access and use of these technologies, and in particular what role the OSCE can have in spreading knowledge and awareness of how such technologies can be used and adapted. At the same time, the OSCE participating States and its institutions need to keep in mind the importance of respecting the human dimension commitments regardless of what technology is used. There is clearly a lot of aspects to discuss under this topic, which suggests that e-democracy be considered as a topic for a future OSCE human dimension event.

The discussions in this Seminar offer, I believe, a rich foundation from which to recommit to the principles of pluralism and multi-party democracy which stand at

the heart of the OSCE's commitments, and for the OSCE and its institutions to develop and expand their work in this area in years to come.