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**CiO Seminar on Election Related Issues  
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Opening Session**

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First I would like to express my thanks to the Finnish chairmanship for the invitation.

Since a number of years there has been increasing discussion about OSCE's role and OSCE's future. Some are raising fundamental OSCE criticism. Some continue to love OSCE – perhaps with a particularly discreet love, hardly expressed at the same high levels from which one hears the critical voices. To make things even more complicate: May be fundamental OSCE criticism has its roots also in a secret love – love for OSCE as an imperfect but certainly the most concrete structural expression of an ambition which we all share: Some call it Europe whole and free, some call it greater Europe's organic unity.

In this somewhat foggy political environment OSCE needs a clear-sighted chairman. I congratulate the Finnish CiO for the organisation of this seminar. This is what participating states want: To take at this point a step back from day to day discussions in OSCE bodies. Bringing together Parliamentarians, election officials, experts and NGO specialists creates a promising framework for facts based discussions.

I appreciate speaking today for no one but myself. Decades ago I opened at random Sir Harold Nicholson's book on diplomacy. The first sentence I read and which I never forgot: "The worst kind of diplomats are missionaries, fanatics and lawyers." Keeping this in mind, I would like to share with you short remarks on ODIHR; and a number of reflections on democracy – the mother of all election related issues.

## I ODIHR

1. I had the privilege of seeing ODIHR grow from its very beginning. It started in 1990 as “The Office for free Elections”. The first director was Ambassador Luchino Cortese; plus one officer and one secretary – that was the staff of the office. In 1992 heads of state and government established the “Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights” - as OSCE’s “main institution of the Human Dimension”. By this time it had become obvious that support for the Human Dimension could not be limited to fostering free and fair elections.

2. What the first ODIHR director and his three successors have created is exemplary. At the end of their respective terms of office each director had broadened and improved ODIHR’s capacities. Two factors have driven ODIHR’s development: The natural dynamics inherent in the unending human dimension challenges; **and** the expertise and energies of the office directors and their staff. Obviously, in a consensus based organisation nothing can be achieved without broad support by OSCE participating states. True, all directors were happy to have their headquarters in Warsaw. This marks also – in accordance with the text establishing ODIHR - the independence necessary for the credibility of a number of key ODIHR tasks, including election observation. There were and there are problems related with certain ODIHR activities. It would not help to minimise them. I would however invite to look at problems in the light of ODIHR’s achievements: First and foremost contributions across the triad of human rights, rule of law and democracy. ODIHR’s election related work is widely regarded as an OSCE core competence. Election observation is the single element of OSCE’s activities that enjoys most public attention. Looking back at ODIHR’s start as the “Office for free elections” it was not self-evident that ODIHR would become an efficient and respected agent on the international scene working on a level playing field with the OHCHR in Geneva and the CoE Secretariat in Strasbourg.

## II Democracy

CSCE and OSCE have developed in a drawn out process, interwoven into Euro-Atlantic history. Sometimes we tend to forget, that *democracy* did not yet have a place in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. It was only at the CSCE Summit in Paris in 1990 that heads of state and government agreed to accept “democracy as the only form of government of our nations”.

1. It was also only in the same “Charter of Paris for a New Europe” that the CSCE developed the concept of **comprehensive security**. Thus a direct link was established between political-military security and democratic government. For us today – at least at the conceptual level - this linkage sounds completely natural. Almost two decades after the end of East-West confrontation we

know: Democratic government is in need of further strengthening and consolidation. I am deeply convinced: This is a *conditio sine qua non* for comprehensive and indivisible security between Vancouver and Vladivostok.

Meanwhile the idea of comprehensive security, possibly OSCE's major conceptual achievement, has spread also beyond the OSCE area. Under the label of "human security" this OSCE concept has become one of the dynamic ideas within the UN. Amongst others the responsibility to protect is one of "comprehensive security's" and "human securities" offspring's.

The success of the concept is no reason for complacency. At this juncture of the overall political development within the OSCE area the challenge of new divisions is obvious; a good reason to make better use of the political potential inherent in the concept of comprehensive security. Confidence building could be reinvigorated via the mutually reinforcing relationship of political-military security and democratic security. In the OSCE area we have run into problems in both of these security dimensions. Strengthening efforts across the Human Dimension will facilitate progress in the military security dimension – and of course vice versa. This is the lesson we have started to learn in the 70ies before and after Helsinki. I think democracy, as an integral element of comprehensive security is part and parcel of what President Medvedev in his recent speech in Berlin highlighted as "European civilization's new found unity."

2. Accepting democracy as a centrepiece of sustainable stability provokes a question: What is, **what means democracy?** In the 2006 "Common Responsibility" report ODIHR addresses this issue very succinctly. The report speaks of "the enormous diversity of models and systems of government that exist across the OSCE region." In the euphoria of the early 90ies it was perhaps not sufficiently clear in everybody's mind: No one OSCE state could claim to be or to have **the** one and only model of democracy. Is this a handicap? On the contrary: Only the broad spectrum of diversity in democratic traditions and systems can encourage OSCE nations to realize "democracy as the only form of government". Representative and pluralistic democracy is **not** one standardized and unchangeable form of government. This is why democracy can serve as the organizing principle of free societies with different historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.

However, the lack of a "democratic template" must not be understood as "anything goes". That would ridicule the solemn summit commitment to democracy. The ODIHR report is right in highlighting "the need to be sufficiently clear on central aspects" of democratic government. Possibly an effort to formally define or codify democracy's basic ingredients would be counterproductive. However, why not intensify dialogue within an appropriate OSCE framework

in search for a deeper common understanding of democracy essentials? This would strengthen OSCE coherence with a view to “our” form of government.

3. We know that values can be expressed as commitments. However, values are founded and spread through **dialogue and cooperative interaction**. Both elements are essential and OSCE disposes of flexible frameworks and instruments for both.

For interaction as a means of strengthening the foundations of democracy OSCE offers a broad spectrum of possibilities. As a multilateral agent OSCE’s exclusively co-operative assistance has a number of advantages. In particular OSCE can more easily cope with the unavoidable delicacies related to outside support for democracy development and democracy protection.

I think it is true: When OSCE developed instruments for democracy support in the early 90ies, the countries one had in mind were the NIS, the Newly Independent States. One could have known better: All OSCE countries are prone to democracy deficits. These days the “Figaro” ran a thoughtful article under the heading “Malaise dans la démocratie“. Last week a German weekly concluded: “The defence of democracy is scandalously bad” – in Germany not in Zimbabwe. Add further challenges, most of them appearing East and West of Vienna: Extremely low levels of participation in elections; party financing; the electoral status of minorities and so on. Let us finally realize: Democracy dialogue, including election related issues, is not a one-way street.

4. A quick look at **OSCE’s instruments facilitating interaction** on democracy development and democracy protection underlines a comprehensive approach: As to ODIHR, it has a broad mandate going far beyond election related activities. The Representative on Freedom of the Media offers advice and support concerning the delicate – and vital - role of media in the context of founding and maintaining democracy. For the tasks of the HCNM democratic government on highest and grass root levels can open possibilities for fair solutions of national minority problems. Similarly field operations, particularly in conflict prevention or conflict resolution roles engage in supporting development of democratic processes on all levels. More generally speaking encouraging participatory structures at grass root level provides for learning democracy by doing. On the other hand OSCE offers assistance for introducing participatory elements into the design of good governance structures across OSCE’s three dimensions: Be it police or armed forces; SMEs or water management; political parties or civil society organisations.

5. In a long article in the current edition of “Foreign Affairs” Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice speaks of the “**untidiness of democracy**”. Indeed, election campaigns, elections and democratic decision making can be rather “untidy”. Therefore checks and balances are necessary to create

and maintain healthy democracies. Traditionally such checks and balances were strictly internal. Today, having experienced their own fallibilities OSCE countries accept that their respective democratic government is “a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and (does) not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned”.

As you know, this “categorical and irrevocable declaration” is the gist of the 1991 Moscow document. Meanwhile we have learned that democratic developments are never fast or easy. Thus a sense of realism has been introduced into our commitment to democratic government. This is not meant to weaken the commitment but to make it real for everyone. Democracy is indeed a never-ending challenge for **all** nations. Those who have not been privileged with longstanding democratic traditions are bound to create a democratic culture over time. Looking at two centuries of German history it is not difficult to understand how much time it can take until democracy develops sustainable roots. Clearly, this is not an invitation to take one’s time but to make the most of it.

6. There is hardly any issue more closely related to elections than democracy. It is a **complex relationship**. Democracy must be based on free and fair elections. However, a superficial electoral democracy has little chance to lead to sustainable government by and for the people. In fact democracy develops in a complex interplay with the rule of law and human rights as well as with key elements of the economic dimension. That has led to the much discussed question: What comes first? Or in political science speak - the sequencing problem. There is no standard answer. Priorities will be different from society to society, from country to country. One thing however is clear: Sustainable progress can only be achieved, with a certain balance within this complex interplay. This is one of the reasons why authoritarian regimes have difficulties to achieve sustainable stability: Particular challenges create temptations to concentrate on one particular problem, e.g. the economy, while neglecting the other ones. This risks blocking the development of the broad dynamic forces necessary for a state where people find it comfortable to live and where the dignity and the potential of the individual can develop to the full.

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A final question: What could reflections on democracy contribute to dialogue on election related issues? They might help to keep in mind that neither an election nor election observation is an end in itself. Therefore putting election related issues in the broader perspective of democracy development might facilitate what we are looking for today and tomorrow: Constructive dialogue.