



Ladies and gentlemen:

It is great honor for Regional Dialogue to join distinguished organizers and eminent Uzbek intellectuals in their effort to open discussions on political rights. This year on December 27th, Uzbekistan is facing important events – parliamentary and local elections.

Elections represent important aspect in the process of democratization and state building. It is an opportunity to encourage more active participation of citizens that feel committed and inspired to contribute their talents, experiences and visions to the objectives of public interests and common good.

Implementation of conditions for free exercise of political rights – both in the sense of giving every individual the right to participation in all issues of public interest, and in the sense of having the right to openly express own thoughts, positions and vision, even if these do not coincide with the current majority views, is probably the most important step in transition from authoritarian culture into democratic one. So I would like to congratulate Uzbekistan to fully embark on this path and express my sincere wishes that this step would further contribute to internal growth of Uzbek nation and strengthen its international credibility as respected partner with emerging democracy.

This international round table is an opportunity to share experiences between Uzbek and international partners and I warmly welcome it. All our countries, as they strive for democracy, often with trials and errors based on ideal visions that are always hard to implement in practice, depend on each other's experiences and learn from them. Either by sharing best practices or by learning what mistakes should be avoided if possible. In this perspective, the dialogue we're opening with this round table can be precious. So I would like to encourage all participants – Uzbek and international – to be open, sincere and constructive in their contributions to make it a worthwhile experience for Uzbekistan and its people.



I would like to start by sharing my experiences from Slovenia and some other countries, especially those related to early transition period. I would like to point out some aspects that I perceive as important for the campaign period:

1/ political pluralism means competition of ideas, visions, tactics and leadership options. This inevitably includes critical thinking – open and public assessments of current policies and practices, and arguments why different or new policies would be better.

Our people, those in power as those just representing ordinary citizens, due to past legacies that privileged one policy option, have not been used to such experience of critical thinking in the area of politics and they often react with dismay or intolerance to this new process. It is therefore very important to fully understand this aspect and learn to agree to disagree without causing any bigger emotional stress or conflicts.

It is also very important for the state, seriously committed to democracy, to withhold any repressive reactions to competing individuals or groups exposing their positions. Strict instructions by national and local administrations should be given to all law enforcement officials and power ministries not to interfere with this process, to restrict or manipulate it in any way. In most of our countries, we have paid special attention to this aspect especially in early transition period. Fear from the state is usually a strong factor with every average citizen when suddenly faced with multiple political options, and often presents a strong obstacle for a more active political engagement and participation. So every attempt should be made – especially during campaign period, to limit this factor. Partial political options that compete as equal are not identical to state and nation's interests nor should possess exclusive ownership of the state mechanisms and tools to defend their partial interests and political existence. Pluralism means every political option, even if marginal, should receive equal and fair chance to present its vision and argument. It is up to majority vote to freely and responsibly decide which option –

or which options - best serve public interests – and the state administration should not interfere in this process.

2/ The logic of campaign means political platforms are publicly explained and defended by pointing out their specifics – in how they differ and not identify with the current and other existing policies and what proposals they offer that could improve the overall situation either for all citizens or for groups with specific needs or interests. This means campaign by its nature raises mutual differences, not agreements with existing policies. While this is a new experience in early transition, many nations practicing it can prove that this mechanism can serve as important potential for raising political culture of the electorate, and contribute to nation's future strategies. It also provides useful mechanisms for several new leaders to emerge in due time and by this it gives important contribution to secure future to the nation. The very idea that everyone is replaceable with alternative leadership or policies might be scary and shocking in the beginning, but on the long run, this is how stable and successful states are built. Stability and security of a nation needs to be built on support of people and commitment to the rule of law where everyone is given equal chance. Basic mutual respect in this process that develops among political players and voters with emerging political culture is the guarantee for all political changes that result from elections, to occur peacefully and not present a dangerous upheaval for citizens and the country as a whole. Opponents are not enemies; they can be partners in the process of state building, either in the role of position or opposition. They can agree on some issues, and disagree on others, but it still means that they can join forces for issues of highest national priority and that the result of the work of all of them is what finally produces higher quality of life and prosperity for all people.

3/ The last point I would like to contribute for discussion is the one that refers to political skills and personal credibility. We all know by now that political skills can be learned. Learning and practice lead to brilliance. It is personal credibility and commitment to public, not personal interests that – from the position of a voter



and ordinary citizen – are the most important aspects through which we try to judge our candidates and politicians. Once elected, they take on responsibility to make decisions also about my life and my family, and this is why I care whom I will authorize for such a role. This is my basic right as voter and as citizen of any free state. This is the right without which my full commitment to my country cannot develop. It is my pre-condition for the loyalty to my society. Any interference with this right that violates the rules of the campaign should be seriously addressed – and this is the most important role of the state and local administration, not pursuing the most favorable political outcome, but pursuing that the technical rules of elections are respected and that the freedom of choice of each voter is rigorously protected. This and only this seems like the right recipe for a prosperous, stable and successful democratic state.

Let me conclude with my optimistic belief into honest determination of Uzbek people and its government to courageously walk towards fully fledged democratic society, including firm guarantees for respect of political rights. A lot has been achieved in the past years, and there is still a lot of work ahead. I would like to reassure you that many of us from other nations and societies – several of them present here today – are willing to stand by you and offer any help we can provide as friends and your international partners as you try to implement your very own Uzbek dreams.