



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 716th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 JUNE 2008

**RE: ADDRESS BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Mister Chairman,

1. The Delegation of the Holy See joins previous speakers in welcoming Ambassador Christian Strohal to his final appearance before the Permanent Council as the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and thanks him for his 16th and final Report.

The Holy See has always followed with particular interest and attention the activities of ODIHR and desires that they contribute effectively not only to the creation of a culture of the rule of law, but also to the promotion of human rights and democracy.

2. Ambassador Strohal has just highlighted some of the responses of the ODIHR during his tenure as its Director. The work of ODIHR's election monitoring program is to be acknowledged as a qualified instance that can assist Participating States in safeguarding and ensuring the exercise of the fundamental right of citizens to participate in the democratic process.

Equally noteworthy are the efforts of the ODIHR to promote respect for the human rights of the Roma and Sinti populations. Roma and Sinti represent a unique minority because they do not have a country of origin that would be able to give them the support that they need. A lack of clear citizenship means solid political guarantees and civil protection are missing. Along similar lines, the ODIHR offers a valid contribution to fostering dialogue among States on the problems connected to labor

migration and to the human rights of migrants. Many of our countries are experiencing phenomena of massive migrations and the ODIHR represents a qualified instance that can assist Participating States in confronting these phenomena and the serious problems connected with them, all the while respecting law, rights and fundamental freedoms.

3. Under the leadership of Ambassador Strohal the tolerance and non-discrimination unit of the ODIHR now lists the fight against discrimination, prejudice and intolerance against Christians as one of its foci. This a commitment assumed by this Organization. It is all the more striking, then, to note a lack of explicit reference to this dimension in Ambassador Strohal's Address. The same holds true for the OSCE commitments in fighting intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. Religious discrimination can only effectively be addressed if all religions are equally respected and protected.

In fact, as far as the ODIHR's tolerance and non discrimination program is concerned, the Holy See counts itself among those Participating States who desire to see a commitment of more focused energy and efforts to fulfil the agreed upon OSCE commitments, and to resist the unilateral expansion of the same. Undue attention to other concerns serves only to distract the efforts of the OSCE and the ODIHR, as well as to forestall effective and timely measures to address the original commitments, many of which have yet to be implemented.

Mister Chairman!

4. This is not the occasion, however, to dwell on these or other differences of opinion between my Delegation and the ODIHR. Here, I am reminded of the words penned by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *"If we meet someone who owes us thanks, we right away remember that. But how often do we meet someone to whom we owe thanks without remembering that?"*

Ambassador Strohal: thank you for your professionalism, dedication and commitment over these years to what you describe as "the most exciting function in the world of human rights". Be assured of my Delegation's best wishes, together with my personal prayers, for every success in your future endeavors as you journey from Warsaw to Geneva.

Thank you, Mister Chairman!