

Check Against Delivery!

Opening Remarks by
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(ODIHR)

At the
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Check Against Delivery!

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me welcome you all very warmly here to Warsaw, to this 12th Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Let me welcome our special guests for this morning: Alberto Navarro González, Secretary of State for the European Union, representing our Chairman-in-Office, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski of our host country Poland, as well as my fellow heads of OSCE institutions, the OSCE Secretary General, Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, the new High Commissioner for National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek, and the Representative on the Freedom of the Media, Miklos Haraszti. A special welcome goes of course to our key-note speaker, Aaron Rhodes, the Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation.

This is the fifth HDIM I am privileged to open, and each time I have witnessed vibrant, active, constructive and inspiring discussions. At this stage, I should only like to briefly set out the context.

The HDIM is the largest regional human rights meeting in our area; one of the main reasons for this lies in the fact that it represents one of the - not so many - occasions where representatives of civil society groups and of Governments are able to exchange views and interact on an equal footing. This is especially significant for an organization where governmental delegates meet on a practically permanent basis. There are only a limited number of institutionalized occasions where we are exposed to the “*reality check*” that this interaction brings.

It is this reality check, where civil society representatives can present their very concrete experiences, good and bad, that allows the HDIM to credibly fulfill its mandate, that is, to review how OSCE commitments are being implemented by participating States, what further effort is required, and how solutions can be found and shared. It is, in other words, an explicit occasion to share good practices and highlight experiences, and also to identify shortcomings and challenges in open dialogue.

We sometimes may risk taking the many success stories and positive developments in the Human Dimension in our region for granted, but at the

same time, we must also avoid to gloss over a number of challenges which persist, and, in some cases, have grown over the last years.

Last December, I presented to the Ministerial Council a report on the state of implementation of OSCE commitments, entitled *Common Responsibility*. In it, we identify a number of remaining challenges with regard to the following issues, most of which were identified already at the Lisbon Summit more than 10 years ago:

- combating electoral fraud,
- protecting freedom of assembly and association,
- protecting human rights in the fight against terrorism,
- facing involuntary migration,
- protecting freedom of opinion and the independence of the media, and
- combating aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

We concluded that more focused political will is necessary to effectively implement international commitments in these and other areas.

Commitments, to be implemented, need to be widely known. Therefore, the report also points to the responsibility to protect human rights defenders, the very people who through their courageous activities bring these issues often out into the open and contribute to discussions on these challenges in all our societies. Increasingly, when they highlight lacking political will of States to implement their commitments, to hold democratic elections, to ensure accountable institutions, and to promote and protect the human rights of their citizens, they are faced by threats - threats to their well-being, their liberty, and, in some cases, even their life.

Since the establishment of a contact point for human rights defenders in my Office, we have been following more systematically problems defenders face in exercising their freedoms of peaceful assembly of association and expression. New obstacles to NGO registration have been introduced in a number of countries, often in the context of combating terrorism or a more vaguely defined “extremism”, while administrative measures are used to threaten or terminate the operations of NGOs. Unjustified detention, including in psychiatric institutions, bans on traveling abroad, or extradition have been used to limit the freedom of movement of defenders. Sadly, threats to and attacks on the physical integrity of human rights defenders persist.

It is our organization that has collectively recognized that human rights abuses are threats to stability and security in our region and are therefore of collective concern to the whole OSCE. In trying to document and outline trends in this area, my Office seeks to fulfill its mandate in promoting human security throughout the region.

It is sadly short-sighted of some States who respond to criticism by refusing citizens the rights and protection to which they are entitled.

It is for this “reality check” of which I have just spoken, that we are glad to welcome so many civil society representatives to this meeting, many of them small local grassroots NGOs which can provide concrete examples and first-hand accounts – we have registered 323 participants from NGOs throughout our region.

I would also like to welcome the many representatives from participating States, in particular the experts and practitioners from capitals, who have registered to share their expertise, good practices and lessons learned. This again proves the relevance and attractiveness of this Meeting. For us at the ODIHR these exchanges are the highlight of the year, and I am looking forward to this HDIM being as concrete and successful as in previous years.

Let me repeat that openness and criticism are essential for making this exercise meaningful, but criticism should not become an end in itself – rather it risks, if exaggerated, meeting deaf ears and closed doors. This, of course, is not limited to NGOs.

The slots we have available for side events are a useful tool to present in more detail good practices and experiences gained by States and civil society. Almost all available slots (even those in the rooms in the cellar) are booked out. Altogether, there will be more than 35 side events.

I am proud that we have set up a Conference website, for the first time also available in Russian language, which will be updated daily with news during the entire HDIM, thus complementing our electronic documents distribution system.

As previously, delegations have somewhat modified the sequence of our sessions. We will start this afternoon with a discussion on National Minorities and have tomorrow our first special day, on *combating*

intolerance, discrimination and mutual respect and understanding. This responds to the numerous decisions contained in the Maastricht, Sofia, Ljubljana and Brussels Ministerial Council Decisions and the Berlin, Brussels, Cordoba and Bucharest Declarations of the past years, and should provide an opportunity to examine how far they have been implemented. In order to support this special day, we are publishing today a ***report on hate crimes in the OSCE region 2006***. I hope that this report will provide a useful basis for discussing some worrying trends and incidents and also effective response strategies. [Copies available outside]

The second special day will be on Thursday and address the implementation of the *OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti*. Four years after its adoption, such an in-depth discussion is certainly overdue. I am glad that we are able to welcome representatives from Roma, Sinti and traveler communities throughout our region, both as civil society groups, but also as members of governmental delegations. Although much has been achieved since the adoption of the Action Plan, numerous challenges still remain, in particular in the area of participation, which will be a main focus at this meeting.

The third special topic is *gender aspects of security*; it will be discussed next Monday, when we will have an opportunity to review a range of issues including the participation of women in public and political life, domestic violence, and the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Of course, gender issues should and will be mainstreamed throughout all the topics under discussion during the next two weeks.

In addition to these three special days, all the regular sessions will be held on reviewing implementation of the whole range of Human Dimension commitments.

This Meeting has been carefully prepared, in particular through additional human dimension meetings we have already held earlier this year together with the Spanish Chairmanship. These have highlighted specific challenges of the situation of human rights defenders - this Meeting will offer an opportunity to look at the concrete follow up. I take this opportunity to thank the Spanish Chairmanship for the importance they have been giving to this topic, and also to the Parliamentary Assembly for highlighting the issue in a resolution at their Annual Meeting in Kiev. I hope that the HDIM will further contribute to taking this subject forward to the Ministerial Council in Madrid.

During the coming two weeks, the regular work of our Office will of course continue. I myself will miss, for the first time, two days of the HDIM in order to be in Kiev for the parliamentary elections this Sunday, where our Election Observation Mission will be deploying more than 600 observers. In addition, we are preparing for the deployment of an Assessment Mission to the 21 October parliamentary elections in Switzerland. We also hope for timely invitations to the upcoming Sejm elections in Poland, which will be held on that same day, as well as to the December elections to the Duma in the Russian Federation.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

An article published recently in an international periodical described our organization as “worse than useless”. Others like to depict us as in a constant state of crisis. I certainly do not share these views. On the contrary, it is meetings such as the HDIM which show just how vibrant the Human Dimension really is. We see that the OSCE is closely connected to the “real world”, through numerous concrete activities of its institutions and field operations; we also see that there can be fruitful and constructive exchange between civil society and governments on the collective OSCE stage, hopefully leading to positive repercussions at the national and local levels.

Over thirty years ago, at the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, the CSCE was at the front lines in introducing the practical aspects of realizing democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights into international fora and concrete work. Today, thirty years on, many of the issues identified then continue to affect human security: torture, inequality and discrimination, trafficking in Human Beings, hate crimes, suppression of individual and collective human rights, election fraud. But we have moved on, and forward, not least thanks to the regular reviews by the HDIM and other human dimension meetings. Progress is undeniable, as is the contribution of our organization to it. Unfortunately, denial of progress equally continues to pose a threat. This meeting should therefore be guided by two principles: inclusiveness, and accountability.

Our organization is specifically designed to deal with security threats such as those I have just mentioned. I challenge us all to make sure this HDIM makes its contribution and fulfils its objectives: it is not only an opportunity for an open exchange of views, as important as this is; it should also enable

us to take concrete results and recommendations forward to this year's Ministerial Meeting in Madrid, and back to capitals, in order to help participating States effectively fulfill the promises they have made, to each other and to their citizens.

Thank you.