

2013 HUMAN DIMENSION SEMINAR

Media Freedom Legal Framework

Warsaw, Sofitel Victoria
13-15 May 2013



**Opening Remarks by Douglas Wake,
First Deputy Director of the OSCE Office for
Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)
Warsaw, 13 May 2013**

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. I am Doug Wake, First Deputy Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and it is my pleasure to welcome all participants to this 2013 Human Dimension Seminar on media freedom legal framework. I greet you also on behalf of ODIHR's Director, Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, who was unfortunately unable to join us here today because he is in Sofia with our mission to observe the Bulgarian elections.

The annual Human Dimension Seminar is one of five mandated events held throughout the year, along with the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and three Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings (SHDMs), which take place in Vienna. Last month ODIHR supported the OSCE's Ukrainian Chairmanship-in-Office in organizing an SHDM on freedom of movement and human contacts in Vienna, and we will be providing the same support for the next SHDM on the rule of law in the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the 10th and 11th of July in Vienna.

Today we are particularly pleased to be here to launch the Media Freedom Legal Framework seminar and to be able to do it together with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović.

We are also joined here today with a distinguished group of keynote speakers and moderators for each session. Their presence will set the

stage for focused discussions and an inclusive dialogue with all the stakeholders present. I am also glad to be joined at this table by: Ambassador Ihor Prokupchuk of the Ukrainian OSCE Chairmanship; Ms. Krystyna Żurek, Director of the United Nations and Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, representing our host country; and Ms. Isabel Santos, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Media freedom is an essential element of the broader rights to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the freedom to receive and impart information without interference and regardless of frontiers. The right to free media is a basic human right, but it is not a right reserved only for members of the media. The right to free media is a universal and, most of all, an individual human right. It is meant to be implemented for the benefit of all of us. It is also a cornerstone of the Human Dimension and therefore a natural theme for a seminar hosted by ODIHR with our partners from the Representative on Freedom of the Media. As all OSCE participating States reaffirmed at their 2010 Summit in Astana, free media, together with civil society, play an important role in helping to ensure full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

In many ways, ODIHR and the Representative on Freedom of the Media complement each other in safeguarding some of our most basic human rights, such as free media and free expression and democratic elections. Just as an example, even before the post of Representative on Freedom of the Media was established, the OSCE participating States decided at their 1994 Budapest Summit that ODIHR would play an enhanced role in election monitoring, before, during and after elections. In this context,

ODIHR was tasked “to assess the conditions for the free and independent functioning of the media.” Subsequently, when the participating States adopted the mandate for the Representative on Freedom of the Media in 1997, they decided that RFoM would support ODIHR “in assessing conditions for the functioning of free, independent and pluralistic media before, during and after elections.” We at ODIHR now draw heavily on the work done so effectively by RFoM to assist us in this sensitive and important task.

With this broad co-operation in mind, we are particularly pleased for ODIHR to host a Seminar together with the Representative focusing on this topic.

This seminar will provide opportunities for all of you here to exchange views, thoughts and knowledge on key aspects of the rule of law as a framework for media freedom, one of many important facets of media freedom.

I invite participating States and representatives from NGOs and media outlets and other stakeholders to share your best practices in the area of media law and policy during this seminar.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to express my great appreciation to the Representative of the Freedom of the Media and her staff for the substantive organization of this Seminar under what I might describe as difficult conditions. Some in this room may recall that, when I addressed the final session of the 2012 Human Dimension Seminar, I observed how challenging it had been for ODIHR’s staff to organize the event last year when there had been “a mere 14 working days between the adoption of the agenda and the opening of the Seminar.”

I therefore note with a bit of disappointment that the agenda for the 2013 Seminar was adopted by the OSCE Permanent Council – and thus made available to the general public – only last Thursday, 9 May (which, by the way, was a public holiday in many OSCE participating States and was followed by a public holiday in some participating States). In this context I pay tribute not only to our RFoM colleagues but also to the Ukrainian Chairmanship for their tireless efforts to foster the consensus that ultimately resulted in the adoption of the agenda. It is only regrettable that, despite the best efforts of our RFoM and CiO colleagues, there was very limited scope for the participants in this Seminar to act upon it. I also express appreciation to the Chairmanship for taking the initiative to invite speakers and moderators to the Seminar in a timely manner, even in the absence of an approved agenda, and for its quick support in facilitating the issuance of the annotated agenda last Friday.

Finally, while these efforts have ensured that we now have an agenda and an annotated agenda in front of us, the fact remains that the Permanent Council decided on the agenda at such a late hour that some participants may have had no opportunity to revise their interventions on very short notice. I would stress, therefore, that no one should feel that speakers are off the mark if their prepared remarks diverge from the final version of the agenda.

With these words it is my distinct honour to declare this 2013 Human Dimension Seminar open and to invite the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Dunja Mijatović, to chair our opening plenary session.