

*Check against delivery!*

**Address by Ambassador Christian Strohal  
Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions  
and Human Rights**

**Mediterranean Contact Group, 2 September 2005  
Hofburg, Vienna**



## **Introduction**

Dear Chairman,  
Ambassadors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to thank you and the Belgian delegation for giving me the chance to speak to you again today. I believe it has become a good tradition for the Mediterranean Contact Group to have opportunities to exchange views with the OSCE institutions on a regular basis. After talking to you a year ago, the ODIHR has been very active, and many areas of work in this Organization have developed since. This is why I would like to give you an update, and why I see this as a very important opportunity to brief you about the recent developments regarding the ODIHR and the human dimension.

In a few days, we will again have a possibility to meet in Warsaw at the **Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**, to which my Office has invited you. You are also familiar with the agenda and the modalities, and I will only mention a few highlights which may be of particular interest to you this year.

Perhaps we can also again discuss a few issues of common interest and build on the momentum this partnership between the OSCE and you has gathered over the last couple of years. Allow me only to say at this stage, that I have the feeling that there is still potential for further activating and energizing this partnership beyond the regular meetings and participation in conferences. This, let me stress, lies however primarily with your Governments as well as the participating States. As the main institution in the human dimension, we are of course ready to assist on the basis of clear objectives and adequate resources.

## **About the ODIHR and its role within the Organization**

As you know, the ODIHR is the OSCE's specialized institution for promoting democratic elections, strengthening democratic institutions, and protecting and promoting human rights. In promoting democracy and the rule of law, the ODIHR assists participating States in building institutions capable of promoting and protecting basic human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as conducting free and fair elections. A number of other areas of activity, such as promoting gender equality and supporting civil society, are also designed to improve basic human security across the OSCE region. The underlying philosophy of pursuing these goals is that democracy and the protection of human rights, including in the fight against terrorism, are the best guarantee for creating and stabilizing fair and open societies, thereby preventing possible crises and conflicts from emerging or from causing harm to the stability of the OSCE area. These are the fundamentals of this organization, and they are not expected to change in the course of the ongoing reform process.

As the human dimension is at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive security concept, the ODIHR's work also inscribes itself in the broad and cross-dimensional approach the organization takes on security challenges. The Panel of Eminent Persons rightly identified the focus on cross-dimensionality and the avoidance of compartmentalization as essential in the search for a way forward for our Organization.

It is one of the OSCE's core principles that developments related to human rights and democracy are not confined to internal affairs of the State concerned but are an issue of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States. This reflects the experience that conflict and instability are often caused by a deterioration of the human rights situation or the lack, or failure, of democratic processes. This is the context in which the OSCE sees its role in conflict prevention, and this constitutes the basis for the particular role and responsibility my Office has in this regard. In my view, it should also be the guiding principle for cooperation with external Partners of the OSCE.

The ODIHR has been called upon to contribute to the OSCE's Mediterranean dimension from early on. This relates mainly to providing expertise beyond our area, liaising with related partners there, and promoting knowledge about and visibility of the OSCE and its standards through seminars or conferences.

### **Most recent developments and upcoming events**

Let me give you a brief update on the most salient aspects of our activities in the overall framework of the HDIM.

1. Warsaw HDIM, 19-30 September - importance of active participation by Mediterranean Partners, including by non-governmental organisations from partner countries
2. SHDM on the Role of Defense Lawyers, Tbilisi, 3-4 November 2005
3. Preparations for the Ljubljana Ministerial with regard to the human dimension, focus i.a. on
  - Migration and Integration
  - Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
4. Upcoming elections – planned or likely activities of the ODIHR
  - Election Observation Mission in Azerbaijan, November 2005
  - Election Observation Mission in Kazakhstan, December 2005

### **Migration and Integration**

As we meet here just few days before *the Mediterranean Seminar on "The Role of the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation in Migration and Integration Policies"*, allow me to start by presenting the main ideas that emerged from the **Human Dimension Seminar on Migration and Integration** that took place in Warsaw on 11-13 May.

The Human Dimension Seminar looked at the issue of migration from the *human dimension* perspective, and was aimed at examining ways to ensure protection of human rights of migrants and an efficient and harmonious integration of legal migrants, to the benefit of both the receiving society and migrants themselves. It addressed a particular aspect within our new focus on fighting intolerance and discrimination, in which we have been seeking, from the outset, a broad and inclusive approach. An active role of all Mediterranean Partner States in this context is only natural and should be further developed.

The Seminar was attended by delegates from 42 of the 55 OSCE participating States, representatives of international organizations and a large number of NGOs. We have been pleased to see an active participation of the Mediterranean partners for Co-operation, in particular, representatives of Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia.

The Seminar's approach was to propose to the Human Dimension Seminar's participants to move beyond traditional discussions on costs and benefits of migration as merely a cross-border movement, towards looking for practical solutions for migrants already in the territory of the receiving countries, and at the same time discussing integration of migrants as a two-way process which affects both the newcomers and the host population.

The Seminar's discussion revealed that *no OSCE participating State can claim full success in the area of migration and integration*. No society is free from discrimination. Rather, all have room for developing and improving their integration policies as well as to promote tolerance and respect for others.

There was a general consensus of the Seminar's participants that *both sending and receiving countries can benefit from migration* if they take positive steps to combat discrimination and acts of intolerance against migrants and ensure that conditions are created for them to integrate without losing their identities.

Particular emphasis was put on the difficulties encountered in participation of *female migrants* in public life due to cultural reasons as well as to their widespread exploitation in the labour market. A generally accepted idea was that integration could not be successful and parallel societies would be created without the integration of female migrants.

Many of these measures can be taken without special legislation in place, but *legislative frameworks* are important in ensuring that migrants do not fall victim to discriminatory practices and that migrants can associate freely and reunify with their families. The process of developing migration legislation could promote further democratic governance practices if all the interested stakeholders are involved.

In practical terms, the Seminar resulted in a set of recommendations that are contained in the Seminar's consolidated summary. The summary is available on the ODIHR website and has of course been shared with you. In this regard, we see the upcoming Conference in Rabat as a concrete follow-up to the May Seminar and looking forward to an exchange of views on how to implement the Seminar's recommendations as well any new ideas on how the OSCE and Mediterranean partners for Co-operation could work together to ensure migration and integration policies to be at the same time both *humane* and *pragmatic*.

Moreover, in this context I hope to see your active participation on 20 September 2005 at the **special session** of the HDIM that will be dedicated to discussing the general situation in the field of migration in the OSCE area as well as the follow-up to the Human Dimension Seminar on Migration and Integration. It can also be an important platform to present the main conclusions of the 8-9 September Rabat Conference.

This session, in turn and together with the session on **Freedom of Religion or Belief**, inscribes itself also in the wider framework of the **Special Day on tolerance and non-discrimination** on 29 September, a day which has been designed by participating States to

look at the implementation of all Conferences in this field as well as at some specific issues for future activities. As last year, we expect not only important participation, but also concrete proposals in this regard.

### **Human Rights in the Fight Against Terrorism**

This year's second OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting was devoted, as you remember, to Human Rights and the Fight Against Terrorism. The Meeting took place on 14-15 July in Vienna, bringing together 206 participants, including representatives of 37 non-governmental organizations. I am pleased to note that Algeria participated as a representative of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation.

The main objective of the Meeting was to discuss specific human rights at risk and challenges that the international community faces in the fight against terrorism. OSCE commitments, such as the 2001 Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism and the 2004 Sofia Ministerial Statement on Preventing and Combating Terrorism re-emphasize the determination of OSCE participating States to combat terrorism with "respect for the rule of law and in accordance with (their) obligations under international law, in particular human rights, refugee and humanitarian law". Counter-terrorism measures that fall outside the framework of the rule of law and human rights standards effectively roll back well-established norms and lay the foundations for further insecurity.

Participants discussed *freedom of religion* in the context of the fight against terrorism and stressed the importance of inter- and intra-religious dialogue. OSCE participating States should reach out to minority religious communities and work with them to combat terrorism. The discussion also focused on how OSCE participating States across the region should ensure that the fight against terrorism and violent 'extremism' must not be used to crack down on legitimate political opposition.

When discussing *torture and the fight against terrorism*, all participants reiterated the absolute and non-derogable prohibition on torture. Participants recommended that States should ensure careful examination of the cases of persons subject to expulsion or extradition to ensure that there is no prospect of torture.

Finally, participants also examined various ways in which *civil society* can be an active and positive force in the fight against terrorism.

As always, the recommendations generated by the various human dimension meetings during the year will be taken up by the HDIM later this month. Again, you are invited to participate actively, as in the past. This does not only add important voices to the meeting itself, but also contributes to further preparations for the Ministerial Council, for which the HDIM constitutes a major platform.

**Possible other areas/projects of cooperation between ODIHR and MPCs** (also in view of implementation of PC.DEC/571)

➤ **Participation in meetings**

As you very well know, some of you from personal experience, not just the HDIM and the Human Dimension Seminar, but all the Human Dimension meetings are fully open to the Partner States (both Government representatives and civil society/NGO representatives, as is the case for the participating States).

The meetings which the ODIHR organizes each year in the Human Dimension are the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, and the Human Dimension Seminar in Warsaw, and we also assist the Chairmanship in holding the Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings in Vienna. They are open to the OSCE Partner States. I am glad that this has happened in the past, but I would again like to invite you to make much more active use of this opportunity, in particular through encouraging NGOs from your countries to participate.

As has been stated before, the involvement of civil society representatives from Partner States in Human Dimension related-meetings would not only be beneficial and conducive to sharing information and building on partnerships; this involvement, and the opportunities provided for contacts with representatives from other international organisations and experts has become an essential element of what makes these meetings productive and interesting.

➤ **Election Observation**

The Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation are invited to provide Short-Term Observers (STOs) to ODIHR's Election Observation Missions (EOMs) based on PC.DEC/430. This has already been tested in practice and could be developed further.

➤ **Visits to the ODIHR**

Apart from visits to our Office to which you are all most cordially invited, there has also been the idea of possible internships, an idea raised in the context of the implementation of Decision 571. This could certainly be envisaged within the framework of the ODIHR's internship programme, coordinated by our Human Resources Unit.

➤ **ODIHR visits to Mediterranean Partners**

It has been suggested that activities in Partner States could include organizing briefings, workshops and presentations by OSCE Institutions on the main field of activities of the Organization including human rights and democratic institutions (implementation of Decision 571).

We have to consider serious resource constraints (time, money, human), and would preferably develop a framework, and well planned objectives and methodology. I would be grateful for your ideas in this regard, and will discuss this further with my OSCE internal partners.

➤ **Enhancing knowledge of the OSCE and human dimension commitments in Partner States**

Last year, I made a concrete project proposal in this forum: The idea is to make the OSCE *acquis* more accessible to citizens in your countries and therefore produce a translation of "The OSCE Human Dimension Commitments" into languages widely spoken in the

Mediterranean Partner States. We would seek quality control through a related partner institution in a Partner country in view of wide dissemination of OSCE human dimension standards and expertise. This could help to establish a network of human rights and democracy related institutions in the Mediterranean without duplicating other efforts and at the same time filling this network with some concrete substance and meaningful exchanges. We have, unfortunately, not yet received any feedback on this proposal. But, as I continue to consider this a relevant activity to pursue, I reiterate my proposal, and invite participating States to support this initiative which could add a practical and hands-on element to the Mediterranean dimension.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The human dimension of security and the OSCE's particular commitments and achievements in this area must be a cornerstone of the Organization's external relations and cooperation. The Permanent Council, when it reiterated the importance of comprehensive and indivisible security in Decision 571, stressed exactly that. I am again grateful to you for this opportunity to discuss with you in this forum, and want to again express my conviction that, as already set out in Helsinki 30 years ago, the OSCE needs a Mediterranean dimension, and benefits from it. The more we develop this cooperation, the more OSCE States as well as Partner States will benefit through increased security, including for our citizens.

I thank you for your continued interest and look forward to your contributions.