

Address by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič,
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at the

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here among you. As you know, I represent an international institution devoted to the promotion of democratic institutions and human rights, headquartered here in Warsaw, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE.

We assist States to achieve international standards to which they have committed themselves. This work is done on the basis of consensus documents that all participating States of the OSCE have agreed to. We monitor, we report, we assist. In many areas: tolerance, non-discrimination, Roma and Sinti, rule of law, fundamental freedoms, migration, anti-trafficking, elections, to name the most important ones.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is a special occasion. We celebrate 20 years of Poland's membership in the Council of Europe. For Poland, as for many other countries in the region, entering the Council 20 years ago was

nothing less than a homecoming. As it so happens, we are also this year celebrating a 20-year anniversary - the creation of ODIHR in 1991. ODIHR and the democratic Poland within the Council of Europe are, so to speak, twins.

The transformation in Central and Eastern Europe started in Poland, and it had a global impact. The changes became a catalyst for the spread of democracy and human rights in the entire region. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Poland was not just taking its own important steps on the arduous road of democratic transition but it became an inspiration for many others to follow.

Two decades later, we see a Poland that has successfully claimed its rightful place in the family of democracies, and, as grateful beneficiary of international and European solidarity in the past, is now extending its own solidarity and democracy support in its neighbourhood and the world.

Indeed, Warsaw, a city whose name once was synonymous with terror and destruction, has been transformed into a leading centre of democratization: the seat of our Institution, the ODIHR since 1991, and more recently as host to the Community of Democracies. To this we can add the growing numbers of international democratization organizations opening offices in Warsaw, and its

vibrant civil society. It is only right that the Council of Europe has recently opened a liaison office here too.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Democracy has a special meaning and central place in the strategy, structures and policies of three key European institutions, the European Union, the CoE, and the OSCE.

- First, the European Union placed the fulfilment of democratic standards at the heart of its enlargement conditionalities, creating powerful incentives for the consolidation of democracy;
- Second, the Council of Europe set an ever expanding array of democracy standards and developed institutions such as the Venice Commission and the Group of States against corruption (GRECO);
- Third, the CSCE transformed itself into the OSCE, recognizing at Paris in 1990 that democracy was to be “*the only system of government for our nations*”; it also adopted powerful and detailed commitments, and created institutions to assist

states in the building and strengthening of democratic institutions.

Twenty years later, this “*triangle of democracy*” – the EU, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE - has been instrumental in developing a dense and detailed framework of norms, values and practices that define the basic understandings of democracy in our region. Practical cooperation and interaction has been key to this.

Allow me here to offer some examples from the perspective of ODIHR:

- First of all, our cooperation with the Council of Europe is deeply embedded into our work at the OSCE. We have developed a comprehensive library of joint legal opinions and guidelines with the Venice Commission; we are partnering on the occasion of election observation missions with the CoE’s Parliamentary Assembly;
- Second, the OSCE and the European Union have developed increasing synergies, cooperating pragmatically and practically. Our election observation reports are being used extensively as benchmarks for the EU’s political dialogues with enlargement candidates and partner states; and we have also benefited from the EU’s financial support for a number of

programmes and projects in the field of democratization, human rights, and the rule of law.

All three organizations – the COE, the EU and the OSCE - are intensely engaged in human rights advocacy, norm promotion and democracy assistance. As my colleagues on this panel will be able to confirm, progress on this front may be cumbersome and slow as the challenges to move from the legacies of a totalitarian past to a pluralistic future not only remain, but have become stronger in certain areas. It must remain our unshakeable conviction that progress in the field of human rights and democracy is possible. These are not, as it is sometimes said, values that are imposed from the outside. In the OSCE and in the COE, these are values to which our member states have subscribed to out of their own volition.

We - international institutions - can make valuable contributions to move closer to the objective of *“a free and democratic society in all participating States”* (OSCE Lisbon Summit Declaration, 1996). But we must have the courage and imagination to craft new models of cooperation among our organizations that fit the unique needs of transitional societies to bring them closer to what our organizations have defined as norms for pluralistic democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe offer a rich and shared experience of best practices that we can tap into. Over the past two decades, Poland has demonstrated in an impressive manner how to conduct a successful transition to democracy with the support of international organizations like ours. As such, the Polish example is a powerful model for the new or incomplete transition processes we are supporting through our work today.

Thank you.