

Address on behalf of the Host Country by Ms. Grażyna Bernatowicz
Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Human Dimension Seminar
May 18, 2011

Mister Chairman,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome the participants of the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar here in Warsaw. I am particularly glad that among the distinguished guests I can welcome Minister Evaldas Ignatavicius, representing the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. We are highly appreciative of the Lithuanian Chairmanship, in particular, of its engagement in and support for human dimension activities.

Without doubt this gathering of government officials, academics and representatives of non-governmental organizations, who in the course of the next three days will be debating matters of fundamental importance for democracy, is clear evidence of the continued relevance of the OSCE human dimension and meetings organized under its aegis.

Let me take this opportunity to underscore what we were able to agree upon at the Astana Summit five months ago. We reaffirmed *“that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.”* Therefore, we should keep reminding ourselves of our commitments in the field of human rights and engage jointly in efforts to assure their better implementation. Our obligation means also our pledge to actively participate in the human dimension events, exchange experiences, identify best practices and present recommendations.

A clear and painful illustration of the tragic ramifications of the lack of democracy and respect for human rights are the current developments in close vicinity of the OSCE area. They also drive home the message that we have a constant duty to promote democratic values and fundamental freedoms both within the OSCE boundaries and beyond. We should also support and stand up for all those who dedicate their energy, private and professional life to the upholding of these values.

In the run-up to the Polish Presidency of the EU Council, which starts in July, I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate that for my country, the EU activity in the field of promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms is of crucial importance and should remain one of focal points of the EU's external action. Poland will spare no effort to sustain and strengthen this principle.

Turning back to the Seminar, I have noticed with satisfaction the innovative approach taken by the Chairmanship to the seminar theme which resulted in selecting interesting subjects that we have not often discussed. Freedom of associations is a fundamental human right, and political parties are in fact the core of modern democracies. A political system without independent, well functioning political parties would lack solid democratic foundations and be but a façade, behind which human rights and democratic values are not really respected. With this in mind, there are several key issues concerning political parties which should be interesting to discuss on their merits and in terms of their practical or technical aspects. Some of them seem to be particularly important, such as financing, registration requirements, transparency of internal regulations and procedures, the impact of new technologies on the way the parties operate as well as the way a country's electoral system influences its political scene.

Finally, as we mark the 20th anniversary of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, I would like to express my appreciation to the Office and its Director Ambassador Lenarcic; you and your team are justly praised for adequately combining expertise and experience in the field of human rights with impartiality and fairness on the one hand and dedication and enthusiasm on the other. Let me assure you of my country's continuous support for ODIHR that I hope has contributed to the effectiveness and relevance of its activity.

In closing, I wish you interesting and lively discussions.

Thank you for your attention.