



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Opening remarks by  
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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the  
**Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

**[Check against delivery]**

Warsaw, Poland – 21 September 2015

Dear excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured and delighted to participate at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. I wish to warmly thank the Polish Government and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for continuing to host this important meeting.

As you recall, my mandate is essentially a conflict prevention one. Participating States have mandated my office to provide early warning and take early action to prevent tensions involving national minority issues from developing into conflict.

At the same time, participating States have acknowledged the inseparable linkage between minority rights, and peace and stability. This connection is part of the OSCE DNA. Indeed, ensuring respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities is essential for the prevention of conflict. Key to addressing minority issues lies, therefore, in the full implementation of relevant international commitments, including OSCE Human Dimension commitments, related to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

The linkage between minority rights, and security and stability was reaffirmed by the participating States in the CSCE Copenhagen Document. This document, adopted 25 years ago, represents a milestone in the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

It is to be noted that the starting point of the provisions related to national minorities in the Copenhagen Document emphasize that questions relating to national minorities can only be satisfactorily resolved in a democratic political framework based on the rule of law with a functioning, independent judiciary. This statement is more valid than ever. Unfortunately, we see today many instances where national minorities do not feel secure enough to seek legal remedy to their grievances. That is also why we have invited participants at the session devoted to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities on 1 October to discuss what can be done to guarantee access to justice for minorities. I hope that practical examples will enrich the discussion.

The Copenhagen Document played a key role in the development of international norms for minority protection and paved the way for the creation of my institution. Against this historical backdrop, I would like to underscore that the Copenhagen Document continues to be of crucial importance for minority protection. The commitments undertaken by the participating States in the Copenhagen Document remain highly relevant today and will remain so in the future.

The Copenhagen Document also inspired the creation of other international documents, including with relevance for national minorities, like the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Unfortunately, we have seen that the inspirational force of the Copenhagen Document has not been maintained; other binding multinational documents in the OSCE area have not been as clear regarding the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and the protection of their identities.

Dear excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the crisis in and around Ukraine, and highlight the situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. As you will have noticed, ODIHR and my institution, with input from the Representative for the Freedom of the Media, published the Report of the Human Rights Assessment Mission on Crimea (6–18 July 2015) last week. As you know, we will present the report in more detail with ODIHR Director Michael Georg Link on Thursday here in Warsaw.

The Assessment Mission found that since the annexation of Crimea, the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian communities have been subjected to increasing pressure on and control of the peaceful expression of both their culture and their political views. The situation is particularly precarious for those who have openly opposed the annexation or refused to take Russian citizenship.

Unfortunately, the Assessment Mission had to base its evaluation mainly on interviews, without visiting the peninsula. The Report of the Assessment Mission contains a simple recommendation on how to improve this assessment methodology: grant access to the peninsula to relevant international actors.

In this context, I reiterate my call on the Russian Federation to facilitate my access to Crimea without further delay so that I can make a first-hand assessment of the situation, in line with my mandate.

Dear Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The refugee crisis that is now a focus of the international community's attention cannot but touch all of us. We see the human desperation and the political tensions that are rising as a consequence. We can all ask ourselves why we did not listen to the warnings that were issued – warnings that the capacity of international organizations working in the countries neighbouring conflict areas had been drained. Once again, an international alert that was not heeded.

But we also see that not all participating States have lived up to another commitment in the Copenhagen Document: the commitment [40.1] to take effective measures [...] to provide protection against any acts that constitute incitement to violence against persons and groups based on national, racial, ethnic or religious discrimination, hostility or hatred, including anti-Semitism. The participating States also committed to promote tolerance and understanding. [40.3]

This commitment is reflected in subsequent OSCE decisions. It is followed by our colleagues in ODIHR and in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, where Article 6 is a direct continuation of the OSCE commitment to take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding between all persons living on their territory.

Countries that have taken these commitments seriously are those that treat all human beings with respect.

My conclusion is that we must continue to work even more vigorously to promote understanding between all persons living on a country's territory. *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, issued by my institution, is a good tool in this respect.

We are unfortunately witnessing increased politicization and instrumentalization of minority issues in the OSCE area. There is also a growing tendency to view national minorities as targets of regulation rather than as active participants in a society. These trends greatly worry me, as they risk jeopardizing the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and thereby increasing tensions in and between participating States. It is crucial that we promote the full implementation of international norms related to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities to address these trends.

Dear excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I look forward to our common deliberations at this meeting and wish us all a successful Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Thank you for your attention.