

OSCE Ministerial Council

ENGLISH only

**Remarks by Mr. Uri Rosenthal
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Check against delivery!

Introduction

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank you for your warm hospitality.

First of all, let me fully align myself with the statement on behalf of the European Union.

Last year, at the OSCE summit in Astana, our countries yet again committed ourselves to all of the OSCE standards. We also promised to better implement them and we confirmed that the human dimension commitments of participating States remain the common concern of all. We have to keep our promises. Disregarding those means jeopardizing the very foundations of the OSCE.

In view of the time I would like to concentrate my intervention on three issues: (1) conflict prevention, (2) the human dimension and (3) partnerships.

Conflict prevention

First, briefly on conflict prevention. For successful conflict prevention early action is crucial. As first OSCE High Commissioner on Minorities, the late Dutch Minister of State Max van der Stoep said: 'an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure'. It is also much cheaper, financially but also in terms of human lives lost. We have to avoid endless discussions when lives are at stake, and act without delay.

In this light: I still hope we can approve a firm decision on the 'conflict cycle', as proposed by the Chairmanship. We need the political will to equip the OSCE with tools to improve early warning and early action; we therefore need to seek tangible and operational improvements.

The Human Dimension

Now my second topic: the human dimension: essential for a peaceful and stable Europe. At the Astana summit we agreed to foster respect for human rights and we confirmed that they are our common responsibility.

We also underscored the essential and crucial role of NGO's. In this context, I note with satisfaction the active participation of NGO's during our ministerial conference, and the important contribution they are making.

But from some corners we hear that the OSCE pays too much attention to the human dimension and that the OSCE is 'out of balance'. I think they are wrong. We cannot give enough attention to the human dimension. At this juncture we are certainly not.

A sad example of a lack of attention in the human dimension we witness in Belarus. The current situation there is frankly unacceptable. The report produced in the framework of the OSCE-Moscow Mechanism is alarming: it concludes that the human rights situation is extremely worrying, elections are not free and fair, the opposition is persecuted, and the media are curbed.

I therefore urge the government of Belarus to release and rehabilitate all political prisoners. To name but a few: former presidential candidates Sannikov and Statkyevich, as well as human rights defender Byalyatski. But Belarus also has to release the lesser-known political prisoners. We have to continue our support for the democratic forces, the independent media and civil society in Belarus.

In Astana, we welcomed Ukraine as Chairman-in-Office for 2013. This upcoming responsibility makes further steps regarding the rule of law and respect for human rights in Ukraine all the more important. 'Noblesse oblige'.

Further on the human dimension, I would like to draw special attention to the importance of freedom of the media. Free media are essential to guarantee fundamental freedoms, democracy and stability. Despite our commitments, the media in many participating States media are still curbed.

In the field of freedom of media, freedom of the internet is becoming more and more crucial.

I would like to use this opportunity to draw your attention to an internet-freedom conference my country will be hosting in The Hague on Friday 9 December. The OSCE Representative Freedom of Media, Ms. Dunja Mijatovic, will also attend, for which I am grateful. My government is very much supportive of her work and I call on other participating States to do the same.

Partners for Cooperation

Finally I would like to touch upon our partners for cooperation. The call for change, freedom and democracy in Middle East has been loud and clear.

Given the experience of many of the OSCE's participating States with democratic transition, I think the OSCE is well equipped to render support to Partners in the Arab World. Therefore, the OSCE could render technical support, if requested by our partners. Any OSCE role in this respect should be demand-driven.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to thank the Lithuanian Chairman-in-Office and commend its leadership during this year. I also would like to welcome the incoming Irish Chairman-in-Office and wish Ireland a successful Chairmanship.