

16th HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

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Warsaw



Opening remarks by

Douglas Wake

First Deputy Director of the OSCE
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Check against delivery!

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honour for me to welcome you here today for the opening of the 16th Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Let me start by extending sincere best wishes from the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, who would have been very pleased to greet the participants in person. Ambassador Lenarčič could not be here this morning because he is with the ODIHR Election Observation Mission in Minsk, but he looks forward to joining us immediately upon his return to Warsaw.

I would next like to welcome all those who will make opening remarks this morning:

Ms. Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, who will be speaking on behalf of the host country;

Mr. Frank Cogan, Head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland, who will deliver remarks on behalf of the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE;

Mr. Riccardo Migliori, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly;

Ambassador Knut Vollebaek, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities;

Ms. Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media;

Professor Adam Daniel Rotfeld, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Co-Chairman of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters and Commissioner of the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative Commission, who has generously agreed to serve as our keynote speaker;

Ambassador Thomas Greminger, the Chairperson of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council; and

Ambassador Adam Kobieracki, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, who will speak on behalf of the OSCE Secretary General.

I will now give the floor to the first speaker, representing the host country. Under-Secretary Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, the floor is yours:

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Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to deliver brief remarks on behalf of the Office I represent, ODIHR:

Distinguished colleagues,

As in past years, Ambassador Lenarčič (or I) will have the opportunity to say a few words at the beginning of each working session on recent developments in the specific areas to be addressed under each agenda item. I would therefore seek in my comments to do three things: 1) to put this meeting and the review process which has been described by the representative of the Chairperson-in-Office in a slightly longer-term historical perspective; 2) to highlight the role of civil society in the human dimension implementation process; and 3) just to provide a brief glimpse of the days ahead.

The Meeting that begins this morning is the continuation of a long tradition. It is a tradition that pre-dates the OSCE, beginning when participating States of the then Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (the CSCE) first met in Belgrade in 1978 to review the implementation of the commitments they had undertaken in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. This tradition even pre-dates the term we now use – the “human dimension” – to

characterize the complex of issues that includes respect for human rights (including freedom of the media, gender equality, and the rights of persons belonging to national minorities), democratic practices (including elections), the rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination. But it is a very distinguished tradition, which builds on the follow-up and expert meetings that took place in the 1980s and early 1990s not only to review implementation of Helsinki commitments but also to enhance and deepen the common commitment of our participating States to human rights and democracy.

An incredibly intensive period of formulating new and far-reaching commitments began in Vienna in the late 1980s and continued at break-neck speed through 1991, with the adoption in succession of the Vienna Document in 1989, the Copenhagen Document and the Paris Charter for a New Europe in 1990, and the Moscow Document in 1991. Important work has continued in the past two decades to further deepen our commitments, particularly in such important areas as promoting gender equality, encouraging tolerance and non-discrimination and improving the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area. The result of this work on paper is the world's most comprehensive set of political commitments to democracy

and human rights undertaken by such a regional arrangement of states. But the CSCE and the OSCE now have also recognized the importance of focusing particular attention on the implementation of existing commitments, which is after all the only way in which those commitments actually become meaningful for the citizens of our countries. The tradition of reviewing human dimension implementation thus builds on an important truth that underlies the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security: there can only be true security and stability in relations between states when governments and leaders keep the promises they have made – to their citizens and to each other - in the fields of human rights and democracy.

While implementation review had been a fairly constant feature of the CSCE up until 1991, the process became more systematic twenty years ago, when in 1992, the participating States decided in Helsinki that they would meet every year - together with partners from international organizations and civil society - to review and consider ways to improve implementation of the extensive commitments they have undertaken to protect human rights, strengthen democracy, foster tolerance and

prevent discrimination. These Human Dimension Implementation Meetings (and Review Conferences during years when Summits take place) have thus become key annual events providing a platform for peer review, self-reflection and constructive dialogue about human dimension commitments: how they are being implemented and how their implementation can become more effective. The modalities for these meetings were adjusted almost exactly ten years ago, when the OSCE Permanent Council adopted its PC.DEC/476; and as you have heard from the representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, review is now underway to consider making these human dimension events more modern, attractive, efficient and effective.

Whatever the results of this review, which falls within the purview of the participating States (and not ODIHR), developments over the past twenty years and even over the past year in many participating States - as well as the high level of interest shown in this year's HDIM - underscore that it remains vital to take stock of shortcomings and setbacks as well as progress. Equally important, as participating States consider how these implementation meetings may be fine-tuned, is to explore how our common efforts can best promote the exercise of human

rights by every individual and the development of democratic societies which are open, pluralistic and tolerant.

I would like in particular to welcome all the civil society representatives here today, as others have done, and to hail the critical role that non-governmental organizations have played throughout the history of the Helsinki process. Were it not for the brave actions of individuals and groups highlighting the gaps between commitments and implementation in the fields of human rights and democracy – sometimes at great personal risk – it is unlikely that governments and international organizations would have chosen to do so. So it was in that context that the drafters of the Helsinki 1992 document wisely chose to provide for the equal participation of NGOs with relevant experience in the working sessions of this and other human dimension events, without any complicated selection or filtering process. We in ODIHR look forward to the continued contributions on this basis of civil society to this and future OSCE human dimension events.

Looking ahead, participants in this HDIM will have an opportunity to engage in discussions over the coming days in seventeen Working Sessions covering the full range of

human dimension commitments and putting special emphasis on three selected topics: Empowerment of Roma Women, Freedom of Religion or Belief, and Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities. Participants will also have the opportunity to reflect on topics featured in other OSCE human dimension events this year mentioned by representative of the Chairmanship, such as combating racism, discrimination and intolerance through sport, the rule of law framework for combating trafficking in human beings, democratic elections and election observation, and freedom of assembly and association. I would stress that implementation of commitments in the last-mentioned fields, which will be the focus of a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on 8-9 November in Vienna, has presented particularly serious challenges in a number of participating States in recent times.

Finally, I would underscore that the plenary and the working sessions of the HDIM will be supplemented by about 50 side events and other opportunities for both formal and informal dialogue among the participants from throughout the OSCE region and our Partners for Cooperation in the Mediterranean and Asian-Pacific regions.

I urge everyone to take full advantage of this unique forum.

With these words I conclude my remarks and give the floor to the next speaker, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Ambassador Vollebaek, you have the floor.