



Opening remarks by the Chairperson-in-Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019

16 September 2019

Warsaw, Poland

Good morning, dear Minister Czaputowicz,

Director Gísladóttir,

Secretary General Greminger,

Parliamentary Assembly President Tsereteli,

High Commissioner on National Minorities Zannier,

Representative on Freedom of the Media Désir,

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

Many thanks to Poland for graciously hosting this annual meeting and to ODIHR for organization and support.

It is a very special occasion for me to open this meeting in such a symbolic year, marking the 30th anniversary of the extraordinary events of 1989.

And our Chairmanship is very honoured to have President Walesa here with us – “whose legacy attests that longing for peace and freedom exists, in spite of unequal conditions, unconquered in all the peoples of the world.” I was quoting the words of the Nobel Committee when presenting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983.

30 years ago, a wave of freedom swept across Central and Eastern Europe and people demanded their freedom and human rights.

This is a year to remind everyone, that the desire for freedom, respect, and dignity cannot be denied.

And the story of the Helsinki Accords is especially powerful in this sense.

When they were signed in 1975, many dismissed the ambitious human rights provisions as not worth the paper they were printed on. Because, obviously, they would be disregarded. But, the power of words was real.

Principle seven - namely respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including media freedom, the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, rule of law, and tolerance and non-discrimination - empowered people to talk openly about human rights and gave them a centre around which to organize and build networks. It helped people around Europe in their fight for dignity, demanding that Words turn Into Action.

That is really what this is still about, and why we are here today.

To continue translating the words of human rights into facts on the ground, into the reality of people's everyday lives. In other words: to implement human rights. And I am very glad that, despite difficulties and after hard work, this meeting was made possible. Because, this is a unique platform, and we need to make use of it. And this is my first main message to you today.

Here, we have the opportunity to engage meaningfully with civil society organizations, to listen to independent voices, to exchange information and good practices.

But also, an opportunity for all of us to account to our OSCE commitments. As our Heads of States reiterated 20 years ago in Istanbul and I quote "Participating States are accountable to their citizens - and responsible to each other - for their implementation of their OSCE commitments."

This one sentence is filled with meaning.

First, we are responsible to our citizens. So, I welcome the broad participation of civil society to the event and the possibility to livestream the discussions.

And second, we are also responsible to each other.

A review of implementing commitments is integral to any political action. And we all agreed already in 1991 in Moscow, that commitments undertaken in the human dimension are matters of concern to all participating states.

The only way to reconcile opposing views is to hear them out first.

The open dialogue must continue, even on difficult issues.

After all, the spirit of openness is the essence of HDIM.

In this spirit, let us value all contributions, keep working where we agree, engage and reason where we disagree.

But, let us also take an honest look at where we are and what it took to get here. And the truth is, we could use some more constructive spirit.

And that is my second message today.

Despite the fact, that HDIM is considered to be the largest human rights conference in Europe, we are putting its reputation in danger: endless negotiations in Vienna, maximalists positions, lack of trust.

Imagine how much time we could dedicate to substantive preparation for the meeting - if we agreed on the agenda early, as envisaged by the decision adopted in 2002. Adopted by no other than us. Participating states.

The consequences of missing decisions are various. And they hit our reputation, as well as our budget.

They pose great burden on ODIHR and complicate efforts to organize the meeting successfully.

And as we all know, for some time now, the work on the OSCE's human dimension and HDIM has been seriously influenced by the discussion on the participation of civil society organizations.

Our Chairmanship has - and will continue – to seek dialogue to resolve issues of concern; so we can come to Warsaw and focus on the matter at hand.

And that is – to translate the words of the Helsinki act into reality for our people.

And as long as there is any form of unfairness or injustice in our region, as long as our turbulent world brings new challenges to their freedoms – we need this forum.

We need the conversations between states and civil society, and we need a platform to have them.

This is THE place to be open, to be critical, but always respectful. HDIM is a pillar of the human dimension. And the human dimension is the heartbeat of the Helsinki process. It might be referred to as the “third”, but it is in no way the last. And the Helsinki process is one of the backbones of multilateralism.

In a climate where human rights and multilateralism are under growing pressure, my final message to you is we need to seize on the fundamental rights ratified in Helsinki. We need to return to those provisions.

History has already shown their potential; that they have a way of being translated into deeds.

In turbulences and quick spins of events – as we are currently experiencing – sometimes it's good to come back to basics. Seize on proven solutions. Seize on principle seven.

Yet, since 2014 we have adopted only one decision in the human dimension. It is high time for some of the proposal to get the ministerial seal.

Our Chairmanship we will be listening very carefully here, exploring potential for the weeks to come.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, I want to once again thank ODIHR - for working hard to make the HDIM attractive and lively.

There are almost 100 side-events and informal discussions.

And I will already take this opportunity to invite you to the first informal discussion tonight – namely the opening reception hosted by Poland and the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship.

I hope you all will fully use the time this meeting offers to generate constructive outcomes.

Thank you.