

ODIHR.GAL/5/05

26 January 2005

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Address by Ambassador Christian Strohal
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic
Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

542nd Meeting of the Permanent Council
Vienna, 27 January 2005



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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is again a great pleasure to report to you at the beginning of what will undoubtedly be an active year for my office and the Organization. Let me start by thanking the Slovenian Chairmanship, and in particular Ambassador Lenarcic and his dedicated team for the strong support they have provided us in planning for the activities we will be undertaking this year.

1. Review of activities in 2004

Looking briefly back at 2004, this was a year we have been moving forward, together with you, and in a number of very significant areas: we have further developed our programmes focusing on elections, democratization, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and Roma and Sinti issues. Fulfilling our mandate, as the main institution of the OSCE in the human dimension, to assist participating States to implement their human dimension commitments, we have encountered new challenges, and, at the same time, achieved progress in many instances. Through a combination of monitoring compliance, on-the-ground visits, human dimension meetings, and practical hands-on assistance activities we achieved our objectives – given our limited resources as well as the fundamental precondition that the responsibility for implementing human dimension commitments lies with the States themselves, not with the ODIHR or the OSCE. The ODIHR has also further enhanced its co-operation with other partners within the Organization and beyond. The ODIHR has continued to strengthen project management and donor relations capacity to ensure that contributions both from the regular budget as well as from extra-budgetary contributions are properly spent and accounted for. We have also been able to enhance our activities thanks to the generous support from our Polish host authorities in expanding the ODIHR premises.

The various human dimension events last year have not only shown further increased interest in our work from governmental as well as non-governmental partners, they have also provided us all with a number of targeted and concrete recommendations on how to achieve further progress and successfully face new challenges.

Thematic programmes

2004, as I said, added new areas of focus: Following the Maastricht decisions, the ODIHR was called upon to strengthen its capacity for the promotion of **tolerance and non-discrimination**. In an effort to implement the new mandate thoroughly, we have established an entirely new programme on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. Thus, the conferences held in Berlin, Paris and Brussels were supported by this new programme and, in turn, contributed considerably in shaping it. The ODIHR's tolerance and non-

discrimination activities focused on the implementation of the 2003 MC Decision on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination and the 2004 PC Decisions on Combating anti-Semitism and on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, focusing on four key areas: 1) the collection and compilation of data, statistics and legislation on hate crimes; 2) the promotion of freedom of religion or belief; 3) the development of education and training projects; 4) strengthening co-operation and co-ordination with other organizations.

The Action Plan on **Roma and Sinti** equally entailed an enhancement of ODIHR's activities in this field, in co-operation with other international actors.

The Office continued to respond to needs for strengthening **democratic institutions** in many participating States, especially through projects and activities in support of the rule of law, the promotion of women in democratic processes, freedom of movement and migration, democratic governance and other areas. We have also enhanced our legislative support capacity.

The Action Plan on combating **trafficking in human beings**, adopted by the Maastricht Ministerial Council, required additional efforts by the ODIHR, notably on the protection of victims in countries of destination. The Helsinki Conference in September highlighted this role, which builds on the ODIHR's strength while at the same time constituting our contribution to the Organization-wide efforts to combat trafficking.

The newly strengthened **human rights** programme has stepped up its work, including training to promote the implementation and protection of human rights commitments, and including in ensuring that measures against terrorism do not conflict with international human rights standards.

And finally, in 2004, the ODIHR was called upon to observe and assess a large number of important **elections, at both national and local level, and including one referendum**. In 2004, we successfully deployed more election observers than ever before, from more countries than ever before, across the entire OSCE region. We continued to promote the implementation of OSCE election-related commitments through legislative reviews, and further refined the media monitoring component of our observation methodology.

Allow me at this point to thank participating States for the secondment of observers to the most recent elections – especially over Christmas holidays in Ukraine - and remind you of our requests for short-term and in particular of long-term observers to the upcoming elections in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Moldova and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

I will come back to election observation in a moment.

2. Plans and outlook for 2005

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are set for continuing our work in these areas also in the current year. Our plans include a further consolidation of past achievements, as well as the development of a number of new areas. All of this depends, however, on the continued support we receive from you, both through our unified budget and extra-budgetary resources, but also through your continued confidence and visible support as the OSCE's largest institution in the human dimension.

Human dimension events

As in previous years, one of the core activities of the ODIHR in 2005 will be its role in the preparation and organization of **human dimension events** throughout the year. The topics and detailed agendas are being determined according to the modalities adopted by this Council in co-operation with the Chairmanship. Let me just mention that in 2004, we were able to organize arguably the most successful HDIM ever, given the record number of participants, side events, and the very positive feedback we received from you. We sincerely hope to be able to continue with this trend to make the HDIM an even more effective forum on the human dimension, which remains relevant for all sub-regions of the OSCE. This seems especially important in this anniversary year. The ODIHR will contribute to OSCE-wide activities in the context of the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, as well as the 15th anniversary of the Charter of Paris and the Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension.

The ODIHR will also assist with regard to a series of additional human dimension related conferences held by the Chairmanship and participating States, based on decisions of the Sofia Ministerial Council.

The ODIHR is looking forward to organizing this year's **Human Dimension Seminar on Migration and Integration** in Warsaw. The ODIHR has been very active in the migration area for a number of years through assisting the participating States to develop policies in line with their OSCE commitments and facilitating exchanges of information between the participating States. We have also been assisting in improving the frameworks for registration of legal migrants, which is an essential step in ensuring the respect of the full range of rights of migrants. We expect that the forthcoming Seminar, together with other events on this issue, will provide concrete new ideas for the OSCE engagement in this area; it should also be seen as an important element in the overall focus of the Organization on fostering tolerance, respect and inclusion.

As far as themes and issues are concerned, in which we believe we made some progress last year and which we would like to build upon, the role of **defence lawyers** in ensuring fair trials has moved into the ODIHR focus, and we are pleased that this area is being considered as one of the topics of this year's trio of SHDMs. This is equally the case for the topic of **human rights and the fight against terrorism**, an issue we have been

working on for more than three years now. We believe that the time has come to consider this important area for a formal SHDM, which will build upon related conferences held in the past years.

Following the 2004 SHDM on elections, the ODIHR will support participating States in further developing this work and examining a possible set of additional supplementary commitments ("*Copenhagen Plus*"). ODIHR has been quite clear in providing a framework for discussion on additional supplementary commitments, most notably in its discussion paper prior to the July 2004 SHDM; still, it does not seem clear whether there is general understanding of what would constitute such a document. In ODIHR's opinion, it would be useful to get further clarification from delegations on this topic, perhaps in the context of the upcoming **election-related** SHDM envisaged for later this year.

Additional supplementary commitments are also an important moment for the organization to envisage the potential challenges of new voting technologies. These new technologies present distinct new challenges to election observation. Any discussion on additional supplementary commitments, therefore, must proceed hand in hand with the discussion of new voting technologies.

Among the important upcoming **conferences** this year, let me mention the meeting on the implementation of national and international Roma and Sinti-related policies and programmes, in particular of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti, on 11-12 April. We have always said that the value of the Action Plan lies in the action it generates, and we want to use the opportunity to take stock of how far we have come already. The Expert Working Group on Violence Against Women, in Paris, on 28-29 April will certainly be an excellent opportunity to give this area the prominence it deserves in this Organization, the ODIHR will make an effort to contribute fully to this event. The Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance, in Cordoba, on 8-9 June will be the first opportunity to combine the results of the more narrowly focused conferences of the past years to a comprehensive approach to this fundamental challenge of our time. We also hope that we will be able to present one of our new areas of focus on an event on Human Rights in the Armed Forces - we will speak more about that at tomorrow's meeting on the Code of Conduct.

In the context of the activities on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, as well as the 15th anniversary of the Charter of Paris and the Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension, the ODIHR will produce an updated version of the "OSCE Human Dimension Commitments – Reference Guide" and will make it widely available. This may also include materials targeted for use in OSCE Partners for Co-operation.

Co-operation with international partners

Throughout all our programmes, the ODIHR will also continue to further strengthen its co-operation with other OSCE institutions and field missions well as with international organizations, NGOs and specialized bodies.

Gender equality

Planning and programming of all activities will include an enhanced element of gender mainstreaming, following the guidance provided by participating States in the **Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality**, adopted in Sofia. A targeted implementation plan is being elaborated for the ODIHR.

Human Dimension Induction Training

The new emphasis of the ODIHR in 2004 in **training** of field mission staff (Human Dimension Induction Training) was received quite enthusiastically: almost 100 participants from almost all missions, local and international have come to Warsaw for this purpose. The ODIHR will continue with the standard model, and also expand in certain areas with more specialized training.

Individual programmes

As far as individual programmes are concerned, in 2005, the ODIHR's efforts to support implementation of the OSCE **tolerance and non-discrimination** commitments and taskings will focus on four key areas: 1) legislation; 2) education and training; 3) law enforcement and 4) monitoring, reporting on and following up responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents. This is, of course, all dependent on your will to support this programme with the appropriate budgetary resources. For the moment, we make do with a combination of interim allotments and extra-budgetary funds, which is certainly not sustainable for much longer.

Allow me to say a few words regarding the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. At today's commemoration, the ODIHR is represented by our First Deputy Director, the Head of the Tolerance and non-Discrimination Programme and our Adviser on Anti-Semitism. This commemoration has not only a historic dimension, it is, unfortunately, also about our societies of today. The liberation of Auschwitz has not liberated our societies of anti-Semitism. We all have to further strengthen our resolve for this continuing challenge. Three days ago, a book focusing on the need to teach about the Holocaust in Poland was published by the Centre for European Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow with the support of the ODIHR. I think this special day is an important reminder to all of us, to follow our commitment to combat anti-Semitism, racism and all other forms of hate-motivated crimes and to strengthen civil society to assist in this task. I want to assure you of the ODIHR's devotion to this endeavour.

Concretely, on our tolerance programme, let me briefly look at these four areas in turn:

- o Legislation:

The ODIHR is undertaking an evaluation of existing hate crimes legislation throughout the OSCE region, based on legislation collected from participating States. In order to support States in strengthening legislation, the ODIHR will co-ordinate the drafting of

guidelines for the review of hate crimes legislation. The ODIHR will also work with the expanded Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief to support participating States in reviewing their laws pertaining to freedom of religion or belief using the newly developed Legislative Guidelines as a basis.

○ Education/Training:

In 2005, the project *Education on the Holocaust and anti-Semitism in the OSCE Area* will be followed up with a workshop of international experts to discuss and analyse the results of the evaluation and produce a framework for the development of curricula on Holocaust/anti-Semitism Education. The ODIHR's Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief will continue to work on issues of interfaith and intercultural dialogue with a view to promoting tolerance, respect and mutual understanding. Tolerance educational initiatives such as the development of the Website Guide to Tolerance Education and training seminars on international standards pertaining to freedom of religion or belief will be a priority for the Panel. Throughout 2005, the ODIHR will also organize training seminars for NGOs in order to support their efforts to monitor and respond to hate crimes.

○ Law Enforcement

In order to support participating States in establishing training programmes for law enforcement officials relating to hate crimes, the ODIHR initiated the project *Hate Crime Training Programme for Law Enforcement Agencies in the OSCE Region* with the National Public Safety Strategy Group and American Jewish Committee. The project aims to increase the capacity of law enforcement officers to identify hate crimes and mobilize community and NGO resources to assist victim communities. The project will result in an evaluation of existing "good practices" which will be consolidated into a resource manual for use by law enforcement officers. The project will also pilot a "train-the-trainer" training programme in two participating States with the intention to expand the programme further upon the request of other States.

○ Monitoring, Reporting on and Following up Hate-Motivated Crimes and Incidents

The ODIHR will continue to serve as a collection point for information related to hate crimes and to report regularly on these issues. In March 2005, the ODIHR will present a report on the information collected in 2004 and at the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance in June 2005, the ODIHR will launch its Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Informationline Database, which will consist of a virtual library of resources and practical initiatives aimed at combating hate crimes and promoting tolerance. Once the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Programme is fully staffed, the ODIHR will also continue to closely follow responses to hate crimes. In doing so, the ODIHR will work in close co-operation with the three newly appointed Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office.

The ODIHR's Contact Point on **Roma and Sinti** Issues will continue to implement taskings of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti in 2005. In doing so, it will, wherever appropriate, combine resources and instruments with the new tolerance programme. As it has its own specific mandate and taskings, it will, however,

retain a distinct role and visibility. In 2005, the Contact Point will further develop its regional approach, and focus on key areas such as the participation of Roma voters and communities in electoral processes and promoting synergies of international Roma-related initiatives.

Our **democratization programme** aims overall at the consolidation of democratic culture, through a broad range of capacity-building activities. These capacities are developed and strengthened especially in institutional frameworks for promoting democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. The ODIHR's democratization activities create discussion *fora* which would otherwise not exist and where issues which are often potentially divisive at a political level are addressed in a working context. The use of relevant experiences and expertise from other OSCE participating States with comparable situations is critical to success; thus, the ODIHR is committed, where applicable, to a methodology based on East-East consultancy and lessons learned from the activities of field missions, in particular in South Eastern Europe. At the same time, the democratization activities, as those of other ODIHR programmes, take into account developments throughout the whole OSCE region.

The overall outputs of the programme are basically the outputs of the project work. The ODIHR has developed a methodology based on the requirement for Assessment Missions as a preliminary phase to project development, done in co-ordination with partners such as OSCE field missions. All project work inscribes itself into the ODIHR's overall priorities and must be justified according to the ODIHR's established methodology; it is subject to ongoing reevaluation both in terms of the efficiency of the project itself and in terms of the implementation context.

In this context, let me briefly mention our continuing internal reform: In addition to enhanced training and other efforts for the further professionalization of our administration, the ODIHR has made every effort to fully implement IRMA during 2004. All of our staff has put in a lot of hard work and effort to develop the new system throughout the year. Of particular importance for the ODIHR is our reporting on projects to donors. This area still requires a continuing effort, further encouraging a joint approach through timely consultations between the Secretariat and us.

Turning to the **human rights** programme, its overall goal is to contribute to increased respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms across the OSCE region, especially also by providing expertise on emerging challenges in this regard. The ODIHR will continue its systematic and thematic monitoring of the key OSCE human dimension commitments, with research and analysis for better understanding of the human rights situation and obstacles to its improvement. The ODIHR will implement assistance programmes to promote and protect human rights. Moreover, regular human rights training for government authorities, civil society and OSCE staff will be held. Specific priority areas for 2005 will include human rights and anti-terrorism, trafficking in human beings, monitoring the right to a fair trial, the freedom of association and assembly, human rights and the armed forces, women's rights and human rights training and education.

I will now revert to **elections**:

Based on current information, it is estimated that around eight elections (presidential, parliamentary or local) will require deployment of standard OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions (EOMs) in 2005. The OSCE/ODIHR also intends to deploy approximately three Election Assessment Missions (EAMs), a more limited exercise that examines specific issues and promotes best practices among participating States, including in advanced democracies. The ODIHR will also continue to support OSCE field missions through Election Expert Support Missions when full-scale EOMs are not deployed. During 2004, there was an increasing interest in ODIHR's possibility to observe referendums, and the ODIHR remains willing to discuss and respond to this issue. The ODIHR will be prepared to observe any unexpected elections that may arise in the course of 2005, resources permitting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Of all of the ODIHR's mandates and activities, our role in monitoring the implementation of the 1990 Copenhagen commitments for genuine and democratic elections is perhaps the most well-known, and perhaps also the most discussed these days, inside and outside the Hofburg. Therefore, I want to elaborate on this subject somewhat. At the outset, I would like to underscore the fact that the high level of interest often afforded to our election observation activities, including by the public, is not due solely to the fact that ODIHR is an OSCE institution, but also to the realization of the quality and credibility of election observation provided by ODIHR as an autonomous institution within the OSCE.

In the context of this election discussion, I would like to quote Ambassador Petrov – and let me also extend my special thanks to him and his collaborators for their support last year. Ambassador Petrov once compared the work of ODIHR's election observers to that of a photographer. Like a photograph, an election observation report is a momentary picture of an unfolding reality. In taking this picture, we are very meticulous, building on the experience of the more than 150 missions that we have undertaken so far.

Over the years, ODIHR has developed a world-renowned election observation methodology, which has permitted it to report accurately on the major trends of every election it has observed. Based on the premise that an election is much more than a one-day event, the ODIHR methodology has moved well beyond the often simplistic, short-term and impressionistic assessments of elections that characterized the pre-1996 period, and which some organizations still engage in, and now attempts to follow the entire election process as much as resources permit, including the way the political contest unfolds, the performance of the election administration, the election campaign and related civil and political rights. The effectiveness of the ODIHR methodology has not only served the OSCE well, but has been adopted and adapted by certain other organizations, including the European Union.

While ODIHR's election observation findings may not always make for easy reading for all election stakeholders, it is the duty of the ODIHR to offer realistic assessments of participating State compliance with OSCE commitments. Those participating States that wish to focus attention away from the picture that emerges as a result of ODIHR's independent observation, and onto the photographer, do so at the risk of a continuing a cycle of flawed, and potentially fraudulent, elections. While the ODIHR is committed to assisting participating States in realizing their election-related commitments, in order for real progress to be achieved, a commensurate level of political will by the respective participating States, and the will to seriously discuss ODIHR's election findings, must be evident.

Before commenting on the year that lies ahead, I would like to look back for a moment to the busiest election observation calendar that the ODIHR has ever undertaken:

- During 2004, the ODIHR deployed a total of 15 observation and assessment missions, as well as deploying, in co-operation with the Secretariat, an Election Support Team to Afghanistan.
- This necessitated the deployment of some 5,000 short-term observers and 400 long-term observers. I would like, once more, to sincerely thank those participating States that offered their support to the ODIHR, through the secondment of observers, during this very busy year.
- I would like to offer my deep and sincere thanks to each and every individual who offered their time to participate as observers. The ability of OSCE/ODIHR to report comprehensively is due to their professional contribution.
- I look forward to such secondments from those States that are yet to start seconding observers with the OSCE/ODIHR EOMs, because the effect of such action will be multiple, including acquiring practical knowledge of how an EOM performs and builds its conclusions.

I also look forward to continue to implement our single standard best practices on election observation, which include:

- full transparency of methodology (described in an official publication), funding (taken from the OSCE core budget), recruitment (based on a public database of experts) and reporting (by public NAM reports, interim reports, statements of preliminary findings and conclusions, final reports);
- efficient communications with all election stakeholders in the field which enable us to draw objective conclusions resulting from listening to all sides involved in a potential dispute; and
- political discretion instructing us not to comment on the political outcome of the election – a rule we have always abided by.
- The OSCE/ODIHR election observation is process oriented and is only interested in election results to the extent that they are reported honestly and accurately, and in a timely and transparent manner.

However, in the course of these missions, we continue to observe a number of trends that raise concerns:

- attempts to limit competition of parties, candidates, and ultimately their ideas, which may result in diminished possibilities for voters' choices;
- refusal of registration and/or de-registration of candidates in unclear proceedings with the potential to impose disproportionate sanctions for minor violations;
- misuse of state administrative resources by the incumbent;
- pressure on the electorate to vote in a specific manner;
- media bias, particularly with regard to state-controlled media, in favour of the incumbents;
- election administrations whose composition is not sufficiently inclusive to ensure confidence;
- lack of sufficient voter registration guidelines and safeguards to prevent abuse;
- lack of transparency and accountability during the vote count, the tabulation of the vote and the announcement of results;
- complaints and appeals procedures that do not always permit a timely and effective redress of complaints;
- lack of sufficient will to rectify identified shortcomings.

This last point is of particular concern. While recognizing that substantive and organizational challenges to the implementation of OSCE election-related commitments can occur, the ODIHR has also observed situations where more political will was needed to ensure such implementation. The problem is not only limited to the political will to implement elections in line with OSCE commitments, but we sometimes are confronted with efforts to establish ill-conceived methods in order to engage in deliberate and pre-meditated attempts to influence results. In such cases, modifying the legislative and administrative framework for elections is not sufficient to guarantee elections in line with OSCE commitments. The conduct of democratic elections can only be established and maintained through a genuine political commitment.

Looking to the year ahead, let me begin by saying that while the ODIHR did not initiate the concept of a working group on elections, it is more than willing to fully participate and co-operate in such a process. Although the OSCE/ODIHR election observation methodology has enjoyed broad support for almost a decade, we recognize that some participating States have, recently, decided to question our approach to this important activity. While the ODIHR stands ready to engage in discussions, or to review if and where operational modalities may be improved, let me state that the ODIHR will not accept that the integrity of its election observation activities be compromised or undermined in any way.

I take very seriously any concerns conveyed to me by participating States with regard to ODIHR's election-related activities, and the ODIHR has been in continuing contact with participating States, both individually as well as collectively, on these as on any other of our activities. I am committed to clarifying the facts of ODIHR election observation, and addressing any misunderstandings or misconceptions. But I am also concerned about the

possible motivation for some of the issues that have been raised here. While the ODIHR welcomes a sincere discussion on its findings, it cannot welcome measures that only serve as a distraction from the real issues of prompt follow-up to ODIHR's recommendations.

Such an exercise, therefore should not squander the possibility to address the most urgent election-related topic in the OSCE, and that is the implementation of OSCE commitments. As already stated, the ODIHR is still observing a number of elections in which participating States are not meeting their commitments, or in which manipulation of the election process is attempted. This is the real election emergency in the OSCE region today.

As previously, the ODIHR will continue also in 2005 to develop its follow-up efforts in order to assist States in implementing their commitment "to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations." Over the past years, we have been contributing to efforts addressing our recommendations in a considerable number of countries throughout the whole OSCE region. It was also in this context that I have just been to Kazakhstan, where I presented our final report on last year's elections, which includes a number of critical observations, as well as constructive recommendations. In light of Kazakhstan's ambitions, I was glad to see that there was broad readiness to discuss our observations, and willingness to co-operate with us in the future.

Next week, I will go to Azerbaijan, where we observed elections already more than a year ago, and will do so again later this year. I am confident that the authorities in Baku realize that after the last elections, we rightly identified room for improvement, and that they will do their best to move ahead in the coming months.

The 2005 election observation calendar is already under way, as observation missions have just been deployed to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in relation to the respective 27 February parliamentary elections in these two countries, and to Moldova in connection with the 6 March parliamentary elections. I want to assure you that in the context of these observation missions, under my guidance and supervision, I will ensure the long-standing credibility of ODIHR election observation, but I will not let the credibility of one of the OSCE's most valuable activities be distracted by political games.

This report would not be complete without mentioning the report from the Training Needs Assessment Team's visit to Palestinian Territories two weeks ago. The report was circulated and speaks for itself. Let me just mention one issue: The ODIHR welcomes the Organization's outreach in election-, human rights- and democratization-related activities to the greater world and stands ready to contribute to the development of a targeted and systematic overall approach, keeping in mind our capacities as well as the real needs of partners in this regard.

3. OSCE reform

In conclusion, I want to mention that the ODIHR is pleased about the decision to strengthen the OSCE reform process and give it the high-level political visibility it deserves through the establishment of a **Group of Eminent Persons**. We hope that the persons selected will fully embody what the OSCE stands for, and will provide guidance on how this unique organization could go forward. The ODIHR offers to be fully supportive of the Group, and invites the members of the Group to Warsaw in order to familiarize themselves with the largest institution of the OSCE, and to be briefed about the various aspects of the human dimension mandate and work undertaken through our Office. Needless to say, I and my staff would also be available for consultations with the Group elsewhere.

We support strengthening of all other parts and dimensions of the Organization, and I have made it clear from the beginning of my tenure that **cross-dimensionality** and effective links between the human dimension and the politico-military and economic dimensions are important not only for the goals and objectives of the human dimension itself, but for the success and relevance of the entire Organization. I have therefore spoken at the Annual Security Review Conference and the Forum for Security Cooperation, and the Economic Forum. The human dimension commitments constitute a crucial 'acquis' of the whole organization, and a measure of its continuing success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fifteen years after it was conceived, the ODIHR is in very good shape. We are committed to our mandate, and grateful for the support from all those participating States that firmly stand behind the values and commitments on the basis of which this great institution was created.

In more than a decade of activities, we have proven that this organization needs institutions which can operate autonomously and which answer to the Permanent Council as a collective body, to the degree to which they have implemented their mandate. The unprecedented visibility the OSCE has received through the work of my Office in 2004 confirms that.

It has often been said that the OSCE is at a crossroads, that it needs reform. The Chairman-in-Office reiterated that in his speech two weeks ago when he spoke of *revitalizing, reforming and rebalancing*. As I am responsible for the main institution in the human dimension I can only recall that the historical consensus of this Organization consists of several fundamental aspects:

- Democratic government is based on the will of the people, expressed regularly through free and fair elections. Democracy has as its foundation respect for the human person and the rule of law (Charter of Paris, 1990)

- Democracy, with its representative and pluralist character, entails accountability to the electorate, the obligation of public authorities to comply with the law and justice administered impartially (Charter of Paris, 1990)
- The participating States (...) categorically and irrevocably declare that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the OSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned (Moscow, 1991)
- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law is at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security (Istanbul, 1999)
- Participating States are accountable to their citizens and responsible to each other for their implementation of their OSCE commitments. (Istanbul, 1999)
- All OSCE commitments, without exception, apply equally to each participating State. Their implementation in good faith is essential for relations between States, between governments and their peoples, as well as between the organizations of which they are members. (Istanbul, 1999)
- The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) and the Representative on Freedom of the Media are essential instruments in ensuring respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. (Istanbul, 1999)

These principles are clear, and as relevant as ever. One thing which is often mentioned in this Organization is a concern that it might lose its "credibility" if this or that happens. Let me express my conviction that it is the ODIHR, through its dedicated staff, which contributes much to the credibility this organization enjoys.

I would like to thank all the delegations who have made very encouraging and supportive comments about the ODIHR and our work in their statements to the Chairman-in-Office two weeks ago. For the ODIHR, this does not only mean that we are on the right track, it also represents a great source of motivation for all of us.

Thank you.