



## Deutschland 2016

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2016

**Opening speech by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office  
Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier**

19 September 2016

Warsaw

Michael Link,  
Witold Waszczykowski,  
Dunja Mijatović,  
Christine Muttonen,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to offer you all a warm welcome to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE.

For over 20 years, we have met here in Warsaw not only to take stock, but first and foremost to consider how we are implementing our joint commitments to protecting human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic standards. A hallmark of this unique and largest human rights meeting in Europe is the fact that we conduct this analysis together with representatives from civil society. And so permit me to extend a warm welcome to all of you too!

The Charter of Paris and the Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension of the OSCE of 1990 remain the basis of and main point of reference for our efforts.

Both documents are milestones in the development of a comprehensive security concept in Europe, and are therefore a centrepiece of European security. They flesh out the concept of security – from “human rights, democracy and the rule of law” to “economic liberty and responsibility” as the Charter of Paris puts it, to politico-military security.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are not considered to be incompatible with lasting stability and security, but constitute their very basis.

The participants at the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE in October 1991 therefore used strikingly clear words when they “categorically and irrevocably” declared that “the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension

of the CSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Both East and West alike agreed, at least during the OSCE’s infancy, that human rights and democratic standards were the foundation for lasting stability and security.

Thanks to this consensus, three central institutions of the OSCE were set up to safeguard and consolidate these rights and standards.

The Office for Free Elections, which was established in 1990 as the first institution of the CSCE, became the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) one year later.

And, to this day, monitoring elections is probably one of the OSCE’s most well-known contributions to lasting stability and security. ODIHR has developed its comprehensive method into an acknowledged standard around the world at over 300 professional and independent election monitoring missions. This afternoon, for instance, we are awaiting a consolidated statement by the ODIHR election observation mission on the Russian elections to the Duma. Election monitoring takes place throughout the OSCE area, and ODIHR monitored Germany’s elections to the Bundestag in 2013, for example. In just a few weeks’ time, ODIHR will also be monitoring the US Presidential elections, which we are awaited around the globe with great suspense.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The insight that there is an inseparable link between stability and the protection of the weak led in 1992 to the establishment of the High Commissioner on National Minorities as the second-oldest OSCE institution.

As an instrument of preventive and quiet diplomacy, the office of the High Commissioner quickly became indispensable, and continues to prove its worth until this day.

The former Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Max van der Stoep once said that the High Commissioner’s work was “breathhtakingly unglamorous”. After all, its impact – as is so often the case in the world of diplomacy – can only be measured against what hasn’t happened. It is precisely for this reason that this institution remains so important to this day.

And, with the establishment of the office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in 1997, the OSCE addressed a topic that is of paramount importance for the continued existence of our democratic societies – at that time with the appointment of Freimut Duve as the first person to hold this post.

The abuse of the media for propaganda and misinformation, fuelled by lightning-quick social media, threats to journalists’ life and limb – all of these challenges remain, unfortunately, all too much of a feature of our day-to-day reality.

This is another reason why we have made freedom of the media a key priority of our Chairmanship, and we are delighted to enjoy an excellent working relationship with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović and her team.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There can be no doubt that the OSCE and its institutions have done a great service in the human dimension in the course of the past 20 years. At times, ODIHR has been hailed a protector of the human rights acquis of the OSCE.

And yet the consensus of the 1990s, that human rights, stability and security are inextricably linked, appears to be showing cracks today.

This became apparent:

Firstly, in the course of the extremely difficult negotiations in recent months on the form that this implementation meeting was to take. Without the constructive support of Poland and Austria, this meeting may well have failed to take place.

Secondly, in light of the difficult conditions under which OSCE institutions have to work today, the distrust that they often encounter, the unwarranted doubts as to their impartiality or the restrictions to their work.

Thirdly, we are observing attempts to limit once again the scope and application of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which we all considered to be non-negotiable and indivisible in the past, at times under the pretext that these contradict the cultural tradition of individual countries.

Fourthly and lastly, we are extremely concerned by the threats that courageous human rights defenders, critical journalists and committed citizens in particular have to face in many places when they call for their governments to make good on their own promises.

Allow me to be quite clear about this: we cannot and will not accept violations of human rights, or stand idly by when people are tortured or “disappeared” in the OSCE area, or when they are prevented from entering or leaving their home countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Experience shows that lasting stability cannot be achieved unless human rights are respected. I consider this to be one of the most fundamental lessons from the developments in the Arab world in the past few years. And an appropriate response to the challenges posed by the major movements of refugees and migrants of our age is not to restrict rights in the host countries, but to guarantee human rights and democratic standards around the globe. And we ourselves should lead by example here. Together with Jean-Marc Ayrault, I saw with my own eyes last week just how important it is to work to protect and safeguard the rights of displaced persons.

We travelled to eastern Ukraine, to the crisis regions where the OSCE is doing exceptional and courageous work to help displaced persons and those who are affected by the conflict. And I would like to take this opportunity, once again, to thank all of the courageous women and men at the OSCE who are working in the region.

Germany is continuing the exemplary tradition established by the Swiss Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2014, namely to subject its implementation of OSCE commitments in the human dimension to a review process by an independent institution with the involvement of civil society – in areas stipulated by this independent institution itself.

Next week, here in Warsaw, the German Institute for Human Rights will therefore present its report evaluating our Chairmanship.

I firmly believe that the effective implementation of our OSCE commitments, adopted by consensus, remains a joint task – and not only for our governments. This also requires the involvement of civil society.

In the face of one of the greatest challenges to our open and diverse societies, we intend, during our OSCE Chairmanship this year, to make our own contribution in this regard and to host a Chairmanship conference in Berlin on tolerance and non-discrimination next month. Allow me to cordially invite you all to attend this conference.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to close by expressing three wishes.

At the recent Informal Meeting of OSCE Foreign Ministers in Potsdam, there was a palpable willingness on the part of all those in attendance to face these challenges constructively and in concert. Let us conduct our talks here with this new common ground in mind!

We should do this in the spirit of the OSCE's characteristic method – with an open dialogue that includes our civil societies and with a willingness to learn from each other.

The human dimension is an integral component of security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. Let us lay the groundwork to enable our institutions to work effectively and without let or hindrance within the scope of their mandates, and ensure that they are provided with the resources that they need!

Thank you very much!