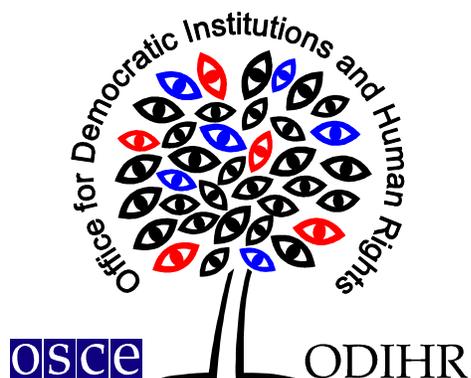


Address by Ambassador Christian Strohal
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Let me start by thanking the Bulgarian Chairmanship and in particular Ambassador Ivo Petrov for the strong support they have provided us in planning for the activities we will be undertaking this year.

2004 – a year of implementation

I welcome that the Chair-in-Office, Minister Solomon Passy, declared 2004 to be a year of implementation, as it is implementation that drives the daily work of my office.

At the Maastricht Ministerial, a number of key strategies and documents were adopted:

- The new OSCE Security Strategy underlines key human dimension issues as security concerns, in particular in the fight against discrimination and intolerance. Their implementation is a cornerstone to security and stability in our region.
- The ODIHR welcomes the CiO's intention to keep action to prevent and combat terrorism high on the OSCE agenda. In our work, which focuses primarily on preventive action in the fight against terrorism, we will be looking to the implementation of the OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism, the Bucharest Plan, and the Bishkek Programme. These documents reconfirm the OSCE commitment that all measures to prevent and combat terrorism must be carried out in full accordance with international law, in particular human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law.
- The ODIHR's Anti-Trafficking activities have already begun to address the tasks assigned to us in the Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings. We are proceeding with the preparation of the Handbook on National Referral Mechanisms, as mandated by the Action Plan.
- On the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti, our Contact Point will continue to act as a clearing house for new initiatives, while working to bring representatives of Roma and Sinti NGOs together with authorities in participating States. The first such meetings took place with Roma representatives and the Council of Europe. We will also continue to collect data to assist states in the elaboration of new policies in this area.
- On the Strategy Document for strengthening good governance adopted in Maastricht, we look forward to working together with participating States and the OCEEA as well as with civil society from throughout the OSCE region in developing concrete ways to strengthen democratic governance, which will be considered at this year's Human Dimension Seminar.
- Following the Maastricht mandates, the ODIHR will be stepping up its efforts in combating manifestations of aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and all forms of discrimination, as well as the enhancement of efforts to promote gender equality -- not just an instrument to combat discrimination but also a means to ensure democracy, rule of law, and respect of human rights. We have already begun working together with the Bulgarian Chairmanship and with delegations on the preparations for the three tolerance-related events to be held in Berlin, Paris, and Brussels. I look forward to discussing the outcome of these three conferences at this year's HDIM.

- I also welcome that the Chairmanship has identified education as a priority topic for this year. Education has always been a major tool for the introduction of democratic institutions, securing democratic governance, generating respect for human rights, including gender rights, and for promoting tolerance. I would like to stress the importance of the upcoming Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on March 25-26, which will be focusing on human rights education. I look forward to the active participation of government and civil society representatives from your countries with specific expertise in this regard.
- Allow me also to remind delegations of the need to provide much needed funding for the participation of NGOs (ODIHR NGO Fund) and representatives from “RAPS” countries (RAPS fund). Meetings without adequate participation, including civil society representatives from all parts of the OSCE region, will not bring the results we expect of them.

Later today, the Chairmanship will be proposing a decision on the topic for the HD seminar "Democratic institutions and democratic governance", as well as for the three special days during this year's HDIM, namely "Promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination", "Freedom of assembly and association" and "Complementarity and co-operation between international organizations in promoting human rights". I look forward to your input in preparing for these important meetings and on ways to further improve their role.

Elections

This year voters in many countries in the OSCE region will be called to elections, among them the two largest participating States, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. In addition, citizens of the enlarged European Union will be electing members to the European Parliament. Elections are also planned in a number of other participating States across the OSCE region. Based on current information, the ODIHR is planning to deploy about a dozen Election Observation Missions.

Allow me at this point to thank participating States for the secondment of observers - especially to the most recent elections at the turn of the year - and remind you of our requests for short-term and in particular of long-term observers to the upcoming elections in the Russian Federation and Georgia in March. I would also like to thank you for the contributions to the voluntary funds for the diversification of Election Observation Missions that permit us to include more experience from emerging democracies in our election observation efforts, as well as the Election Legislation Alert Fund, which enhances our efforts to assist participating States in the development of their election legislation.

In the context of the Chair-in-Office's emphasis on implementation, I feel it is appropriate to underscore three election-related points: respect for existing OSCE commitments, follow-up on recommendations, and promoting confidence through transparency of the election process.

Over the past years, the ODIHR has observed a large number of elections, in a number of participating States covering two or more election cycles, issuing recommendations throughout the process. However, election observation is not an aim in itself but should serve as an important tool to help participating States in the development of their participatory democracy through genuine elections.

It is now time to step up our efforts in assisting participating States to address these recommendations effectively. In accordance with the tasks assigned to my office in Maastricht, we intend to develop, as part of our standard methodology for election observation, a consistent follow-up approach and to provide assistance to states in implementing their commitments “to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations”.

To this end, the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting planned for 15-16 July will also deal with questions relating to OSCE election commitments. I am looking forward to continue discussions on how to further advance the development of the OSCE/ODIHR progress report “Existing Commitments for Democratic Elections in OSCE Participating States” presented last year.

Democratic Institution-building

In 2004, the ODIHR will continue to assist participating States in strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law and in providing legislative assistance to ensure that existing international commitments are met and can be implemented.

The upcoming Human Dimension Seminar on 12-14 May will provide an opportunity to examine how to further strengthen these institutions and make their work more effective to the benefit of citizens. I look forward to a fruitful exchange of views and experiences with experts and civil society on this important issue and to concrete recommendations.

Through the recent PC decision on the new post table, we have been able to establish a Legislative Support Unit based on the success through the three last years with the development of a Legislative database Legislationline.org. Underlying this decision is the need to upgrade the ODIHR's capacity to provide support to, and assist, legislators across the OSCE region, in co-ordination with field missions and in consultation with other organizations. Legal systems have changed, and the ODIHR is in a unique position to respond to emerging trends and pressing needs. Consistency, responsiveness, and continuous dialogue between lawmakers and civil society will be at the core of this new Unit's mandate, while the database itself will grow into a true clearing house highlighting "good practices" and improving access to law.

The third SHDM of 2004 will address the issue of internally displaced persons. In Maastricht, the participating States decided to "take into account the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a useful framework for the work of the OSCE and the endeavors of participating States in internal displacement." Unlike refugees, internally displaced persons are not under systematic international protection. According to credible statistics, there are over 3 million IDPs in the OSCE region; the issue

therefore lies in the responsibility of the respective participating States. The SHDM should assist all of us in implementation of the Maastricht decision and in addressing the plight of IDPs.

Human Rights

Since its establishment as a full-fledged section after my arrival last year, our Human Rights Section has been developing a number of new programmes and will continue to strengthen our activities in this area. As in previous years, the office will continue its monitoring of the key OSCE human dimension commitments in co-operation with the OSCE field missions, civil society, and other international organizations active in this field in our region. We will also be stepping up our training capacity to provide training in human rights for OSCE staff, civil society representatives, and government authorities. The upcoming SHDM will provide a welcome opportunity to further discuss training methodology.

Also in the context of the conferences to be held in 2004 in Berlin, Paris, and Brussels, the ODIHR will further step up its work relating to the promotion of non-discrimination and tolerance. The Ministerial Decision on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination requires participating States to intensify efforts to promote and strengthen tolerance and non-discrimination. In particular, it encourages all participating States to collect and keep records on reliable information and statistics on hate crimes, including on forms of violent manifestations of racism, xenophobia, discrimination, and anti-Semitism. This is an important undertaking by the participating States.

As mandated by the MC decision, the ODIHR will serve as a collection point for information and statistics collected by the participating States, in full co-operation with CERD, ECRI, EUMC and others. We have already had discussions with some of these bodies on forms of co-operation, which may include sharing of best practices and methodologies. The ODIHR stands ready to assist participating States in this regard.

The focus of ODIHR work in 2004 in this area will be twofold: We will assist in the preparations for the three OSCE conferences and the required follow-up; we will also set up a collection point for information and statistics as required by the Ministerial Council decision. But let me be clear: Setting up an OSCE-wide monitoring system on violent manifestations of racism, xenophobia, discrimination, and anti-Semitism is a challenging and long-term task and will require resources, both human and financial. We will co-operate with those already engaged in similar activities in the OSCE region to ensure that our work is complementary and adds to what is already done. And, the main part of the work remains to be done by the participating States themselves.

Enhancing Operational Capacities

It will soon be one year since I assumed my function, and I am pleased to report that we have been making steady progress in enhancing the operational capacity of the office. A number of you have already been to visit the ODIHR, and I encourage you to come to Warsaw to acquaint yourselves further with the way in which the office and our more than 100 staff operate.

In the past year, the ODIHR has been in the forefront of change in this organization, reviewing our structures, work methods, and programmes. We have focused particularly on three objectives: strengthening leadership and focus for the office, enhancing the office's capacity to fulfill its mandate, and developing outreach to all our partners.

The introduction of multi-annual programming to replace individual projects has contributed to our becoming a stronger and more transparent partner both for the countries in which we are invited to operate as well as for donors. It should also contribute to strengthen further our outreach to other international organizations.

Through the creation of a Project Management Unit, the regularization of a number of posts, and the streamlining of our activities into thematic programmes we have taken a further step towards sound professional management. The first results of this process can be seen in the ODIHR's 2004 programming document, which was circulated in December. We welcome dialogue with you on this living document.

At the same time, we have retained the flexibility to react rapidly to changing circumstances in the OSCE region and to provide targeted and effective assistance to participating States. An example of this has been the organization's and the ODIHR's ability to react quickly following last year's events in Georgia. At this point in time, it will be important to continuously follow the process of democratic reform in this country beyond the upcoming parliamentary elections.

In 2004, we will aim to sustain both sound management and operational flexibility in the ODIHR's activities. To achieve this, however, sufficient funds will be necessary. Following the decisions of the Permanent Council on the 2004 budget, funding for the ODIHR, including our election observation work and our travel to participating States, has been severely cut. In the light of the wide range of tasks my office has been entrusted with this year, this decision is difficult to understand. Given the current budget constraints, rationalization will be insufficient, and we will have to reduce our operational activities unless additional funds are made available. I think this would be highly unfortunate.

Having said this, I turn with all the more gratitude to those participating States that have generously provided the ODIHR with much-needed voluntary contributions to enhance our activities in the field.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

After Minister Passy's speech two weeks ago, an outsider may have thought the new CiO's priority, namely *implementation*, might be a rather modest goal. Of course, the opposite is the case. The ODIHR stands ready to support the Chairmanship and all participating States in achieving this ambitious and laudable aim.