

Opening Plenary
23 September 2013, Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw

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OSCE PA General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian
Questions

Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address you here today as a representative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and also as a member of the Turkish Parliament. For many years, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting has greatly influenced the human rights agenda in Europe and beyond. As Vice-Chair of the Parliamentary Assembly's General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, I look forward to sharing the recommendations from this meeting with my colleagues; 323 elected officials from OSCE participating States.

As parliamentarians we take the values, aims and commitments of the OSCE back to our national assemblies. Crucially however, we take the principles of the OSCE back to our constituents. It is these constituents, these individuals – one billion of them – that the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security is designed to protect. It is in this way that the Parliamentary Assembly maintains and further strengthens the OSCE's commitment to democracy. Furthermore, through parliamentary diplomacy, we endeavor to strengthen dialogue and increase security in a truly representative fashion. Through the Parliamentary Assembly, we seek to unite legislators on issues of democratic values and human rights.

Co-operation is the very essence of our security community. It is the view of the Parliamentary Assembly that cooperation must also take pride of place between OSCE institutions and not just between participating States. No one here needs to be told the benefits of dialogue and mutual support. We all know that any obstacles that prevent OSCE institutions co-operating will only have a negative effect on the mission of the whole Organization. So it is at this point that I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to my friends and colleagues at ODIHR for hosting us here in Warsaw. I look forward to working closely with you in the future, in order to maximize our strengths by acting together.

Through their tireless commitment to democracy and human rights, ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly can support equitable and representative democracy across the OSCE region. Whether acting on humanitarian issues, human rights or election observation missions, ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly can be standard-bearers for democratic values.

As you may have heard, we have re-instituted the Co-operation agreement between the OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, when it comes to co-operating in election observations missions – a key element of our work.

A crucial part of democracy is of course freedom of assembly. It is a fundamental right of all people and it is one of many issues the Parliamentary Assembly's election observers watch closely whilst on observation missions. If the right to freedom of assembly is taken away then, more often than not, freedom of association, freedom of belief and freedom of the media are all swept away with it. Tolerating the views of others is the mark of a stable and healthy democracy. Of course no democracy is perfect and as such we all benefit from outside scrutiny and inquiry. That is one of the great strengths of the OSCE and of the Parliamentary Assembly's election observation missions in particular. As I stand here and talk of freedom of assembly as someone from Turkey, some of you may be thinking of the recent events in Taksim Square.

The main focus for today's meeting, and indeed the focus of my speech, is tolerance. It is a topic for which Turkey strived to be included on the agenda and it is a virtue that should underpin our security community. It was in Turkey that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, in its Istanbul Declaration, passed a resolution on Strengthening the Role of Education in Combating Racism, Xenophobia and other forms of Intolerance and Discrimination. It is the view of the Parliamentary Assembly that education must stop being used as a conduit for intolerance. Sadly the OSCE region still has areas where schools are segregated, where not all people have equal access to education and where curricula espouse chauvinism.

All states must make efforts to make schools inclusive and desegregated. They must ensure all citizens have equal access to education. Curricula must be scrutinized and changed to ensure balanced and non-discriminatory coverage; particularly in the subjects of history and religious studies. It is the view of the Parliamentary Assembly, as stated in the resolution that more must be done to develop new educational materials, along with extra-curricular activities, in the name of tolerance and social cohesion. We must invest in training our educators to challenge intolerance in the classroom. To end intolerance, the focus clearly has to be on youth. Discrimination is learned behavior, as no child is born intolerant or racist. Classrooms, but also the media, are they key areas where racism and xenophobia must be challenged.

On the subject of tolerance and non-discrimination, it is of course the 20th anniversary of the founding of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. I would like to congratulate the recently appointed High Commissioner, Ms. Astrid

Thors, on her new position and I speak for the whole Parliamentary Assembly in wishing her every success in her new role. I know she will further strengthen the HCNM's important work in protecting national minority communities and managing interstate cooperation on this issue.

Throughout history national minorities have often occupied a delicate position in our societies due to insecurity and a disregard of their fundamental rights. Contemporary society is ever more complex and there are many different groups in our region, not just national minorities, who are denied their basic freedoms. Some of the starkest examples are the LGBT community, labor migrants and refugees. Today, these are the groups who are most often faced with intolerance, discrimination and a denial of their fundamental freedoms. I ask you: What is the use of a security community if the most vulnerable and those most in need of protection are not defended? We must all help encourage societies that tolerate all groups, through putting an end to discrimination in all its forms.

Of course we cannot talk of refugees and their fundamental rights without mentioning the ongoing crisis in Syria. Turkey has provided, along with other countries in the region, an immense amount of support to those who have fled a horrific civil war. These are indeed worrying times as the situation becomes more and more uncertain. But one thing can be certain: that Turkey will continue to support those in need whilst maintaining their dignity and ensuring their rights as human beings.

As I finish speaking to you today, I would like to point out that many challenges lie ahead. In facing these challenges we would do well to remember the Helsinki Final Act, which binds us together and is the reason we are all gathered today. As we look to the future and the Helsinki +40 process, we must try and recapture what was a truly groundbreaking moment for human rights in all participating States. The Parliamentary Assembly has already begun working on how to mark the occasion and how to add the voice of our constituents to the Helsinki +40 process. When thinking of Helsinki +40 I am reminded of the quote from Aristotle: "Political society exists for the sake of noble actions, and not of mere companionship." The companionship that the OSCE provides has of course given us a greater level of security and a platform for dialogue that at one time was unimaginable. But it is our collective action that is of the most importance.

Thank you for your attention.