

Address by

Mrs. Henryka Mościcka - Dendys,

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at the Opening Session of the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar

**The role of national human rights institutions (NHRI) in promoting and
protecting human rights in the OSCE area**

(Warsaw, June 1, 2015)

***Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

I would like to welcome you to this year's Human Dimension Seminar in Warsaw. I wish to warmly welcome our key-note speaker and the representative of the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship. Let me thank the Chairmanship for energetic and successful leadership so far at this extremely difficult time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbian Chairmanship offered us an opportunity to debate on the condition of national human rights institutions and the challenges they face. Since all fifty seven OSCE participating states agreed on obligations to protect and promote human rights, it is obvious that we should particularly care for effective operation of the institutions which support us in this cause.

National Human Rights Institutions play a unique role in domestic legal and human rights protection system. They do not only deal with specific cases where human right of concrete individual might be violated. They are also entrusted with the task of monitoring and addressing core human rights concerns at a national level. They ensure the compliance of national laws and practices with international human rights standards and obligations. They also play an important role in supporting the work of human rights defenders. In addition, National Human Rights Institutions are responsible for raising public awareness and bringing the legal complexities closer to ordinary citizens.

Mr. Chairman,

National Human Rights Institutions should act as independent controlling mechanisms, vested with a broad mandate and competences, as defined in the Paris Principles and endorsed by the UN General Assembly resolution in 1993. Every state has an

obligation to support National Human Rights Institutions and grant them appropriate legal tools and financial means. In this context, the independence of ombudsperson institutions is, without a doubt, of primary importance. Regardless of their structure or mandate, ombudsperson is expected to be a fully independent and objective element of a human rights protection system. It is true that sometimes it might be difficult to avoid some sort of political affiliation, because of the method the body is designated, but from the day of the nomination the ombudsperson shall be equipped with the tools that allow for independence and impartiality.

Moreover, the international co-operation between ombudsperson institutions plays an important role in exchanging good practices, building capacity and enhancing independence of human rights institutions. We were glad that this spring Warsaw hosted National Seminar of the European Network of Ombudsmen. Ombudspersons from more than 40 countries discussed issues of intolerance and discrimination, with particular focus on rights of persons with disabilities, elderly people and migrants.

Let me also highlight the support provided by the OSCE to National Human Rights Institutions. Active involvement of both ODIHR and the OSCE field presences through study visits and seminars contributes to capacity building and strengthening of the independence of National Human Rights Institutions.

Mr. Chairman,

The institution of Ombudsman in Poland has the status of a National Human Rights Institution and is one of crucial components of a human rights protection system at national level. Establishment of the Ombudsman was accompanied by a nation-wide public debate over the shape of a mandate and scope of competences. Nowadays, very few institutions enjoy such a high level of public support and trust as the Polish Ombudsman. The office serves also as a National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol of the UN Convention against Torture and advocates for its international recognition and implementation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Protection and promotion of human rights and democracy requires stable and reliable state institutions which enjoy public trust. National Human Rights Institutions are one of the pillars of the human rights protection system. If we want to stop a negative trend of curbing fundamental freedoms and narrowing down the space for civil society activities, observed recently in parts of the OSCE area, we should make every effort to reinforce these Institutions and support their independence. I believe that our discussion over next the three days will serve this purpose. That is why, I wish to thank you for participating in the Seminar and the for the illuminating ideas and recommendations, I am sure, you will be ready to offer during the meeting. In particular, I thank director Link and his team for organizing the meeting and for their constant interest in the matter.

I wish you a fruitful discussion and thank you for your attention.