

Extended Conference Programme

Monday, 26 September

- 14.00-15.00 Opening
- 15.00-17.00 Statements by participating States
- 19.00-21.00 Reception

Tuesday, 27 September

10.00-13.00 **Plenary Session I: Democratic Institutions**

Democratic elections; democracy at the national, regional and local levels; Equal participation in political and public life; National human rights institutions and the role of civil society in the protection of human rights

OSCE participating States committed to upholding key principles of democratic elections as an essential element underpinning genuine democracy and had given ODIHR a mandate to support the implementation of election-related commitments through election observation and assistance in the follow-up of assessments and recommendations.

New trends and challenges to participatory rights and the integrity of elections have attracted considerable public attention across the OSCE region, including a heightened interest in alternative voting methods due to COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of new technologies and social networks on voters and electoral processes, and the increased global push for greater inclusion of underrepresented groups, such as women, persons with disabilities (PwDs), as well as youth and national minorities, including Roma.

At the same time, across the OSCE region, attempts to substantially alter the balance of democratic powers on national, regional and local level are clearly visible in recent years, favouring stronger executive powers. Resting on a growing public distrust in democratic institutions, especially in political parties and their elected representatives, these attempts tend to enhance the powers of the executive.

In their turn, democratic institutions should reflect the diversity of society, ensuring equal participation in political and public life for all citizens. OSCE participating States have recognized the fundamental need for pluralism in the institution of parliament and have committed to strengthen political participation of all persons, including underrepresented groups.

OSCE participating States have committed to establish independent national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and have made an array of commitments relevant to the work of human rights defenders— anyone who works to promote and protect human rights individually or in association with others— affirming the need to create an enabling environment for their work and to ensure their protection. Despite these obligations, civil society organizations, individual activists, and NHRIs throughout the OSCE region face obstacles, interference and threats to their safety and security. These threats are evolving, for example, in the form of new technologies and in the context of armed conflict and other crises. Robust legislation and policy measures that facilitate the ability to do independent human rights work and efforts to provide accountability for attempts to undermine it are among the necessary elements to ensure that the right to defend human rights is protected.

This session will provide an opportunity for participating States to take stock of progress in the implementation of OSCE commitments on democratic elections, political pluralism, equal political participation, and NHRIs and civil society in the protection of human rights.

Wednesday, 28 September

10.00-13.00 **Plenary Session II: Fundamental Freedoms I**

Freedom of religion or belief; Freedom of assembly and association; Human rights defenders; Freedom of movement

The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly (FoPA), freedom of association (FoA) and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) are fundamental elements of any vibrant, pluralistic and participatory democracy, yet they are often under challenge in the OSCE region. These rights are recognized in international human rights instruments and reaffirmed in OSCE human dimension commitments. Furthermore, participating States committed to “fully respect the right of everyone to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State” and “the right to leave and return to their country” (Vienna Document 1989).

This session will reflect on a renewed trend, visible in some OSCE participating States, of curtailing these rights and the activities of civil society organisations and human rights defenders, especially in times of crisis or armed conflict. This has had profound ramifications upon the ability of individuals and communities to gather peacefully, including to manifest their religion or belief. In some cases, this

trend particularly affects women and representatives of other persons in vulnerable situations and those who are defending their rights.

The session will further discuss restrictive regulations hampering the work of associations, including political parties, and human rights defenders with new legal and administrative barriers hindering their establishment/activities or access to domestic and foreign funds, more stringent reporting and disclosure obligations and the stigmatization or discrediting of their work.

Thursday, 29 September

10.00-13.00 Plenary Session III: TND I

Addressing racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance, including based on religion or belief

In the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic added new layers of complexity to the already difficult task of addressing discrimination and hate crime, deepening existing inequalities and exposing vulnerabilities in all spheres of society. Intolerance, discrimination and their manifestations also negatively and differently impact lives of both women and girls, men and boys, and others. Additionally, there is a concern that social tensions and a potential backlash to the presence of newly-arrived populations might emerge as cost of living and other economic challenges, including real and imagined competition over resources, consequent to the military attack of the Russian Federation on Ukraine, increase over time. At the same time, there have been numerous examples of civil society organizations that countered hateful narratives, monitored the impact on minority communities, and raised awareness.

In this plenary session, speakers and participants will discuss what progress participating States have made towards implementing their commitments on addressing intolerance, discrimination and hate crime, including support to victims of hate crime. They are encouraged to share good practices and lessons learned as well as examine effective educational strategies and measures, on how civil society efforts can address intolerance and discrimination to foster mutual respect and understanding, inclusion and social cohesion in the OSCE region. Finally, they will discuss the different gender-related experiences of those affected by intolerance, discrimination, and hate crimes, and make recommendations for how these issues can be best addressed by governments, civil society organizations, educators, and other key stakeholders.

Friday, 30 September

10.00-13.00 **Plenary Session IV: Fundamental Freedoms II**

Freedom of opinion and expression, media freedom; Safety of journalists

Independent professional media play a central role in informing citizens on issues of public interest, facilitating democratic debate and holding those in power to account. Quality media reporting is also essential for countering disinformation and hate speech that are strategically communicated by malign actors, often controlled or backed by the authoritarian governments, to sow distrust in democratic institutions and ultimately destroy democratic values.

Enhanced efforts to raise attention to the worrying state of media freedom, its close interlinkages with the decline of democracy as well as to the respective responsibilities of governments are timely and much needed: in many places throughout the OSCE region, the circumstances under which journalists work have deteriorated in the last years, journalists and media workers continue to face violent attacks and reprisals for doing their work.

This session will further explore the interconnection between the state of democracy and media freedom while focusing on the current situation with freedom of expression, freedom of the media and media pluralism in the OSCE region. It will also discuss the role of national authorities in ensuring safe and free working conditions for independent media and journalists; an increasing need to counteract propaganda for war, hate speech and disinformation; and the existing and emerging good practices of protection of journalists and media which stem from the OSCE commitments in the area of freedom of expression and freedom of the media adopted by the participating States between 1975 and today.

Monday, 3 October

10.00-13.00 **Plenary Session V: TND II**

Rights of persons belonging to national minorities; Treatment of citizens of other States and human rights of migrants; Roma and Sinti issues; Equal opportunities and rights for women and men; Violence against women and children

Non-discrimination and effective equality are prerequisites for effective participation in public affairs, cultural and religious, as well as social and economic life. What is more, ensuring effective equality in law also implies a positive obligation to adopt targeted policies and, where necessary, special measures.

The OSCE participating States are called upon to ensure the rights of Roma and Sinti people. ODIHR and its partners monitor the human rights situation of Roma and Sinti communities, including those affected by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Prejudice, discrimination and intolerance adversely affect Roma and Sinti communities, increasing the divide between them and the mainstream population.

Strong framework of OSCE commitments recognizes gender equality as a cornerstone of democracy and security (Moscow Document 1991; see also MC decisions Sofia 14/04, Ljubljana 14/05, Athens 7/09, Ljubljana 15/05, Basel 7/14 and Milan 4/18). Effective implementation of these commitments is often lagging, exacerbated by systemic and institutional discrimination. Armed conflicts impact men and women differently, breaking down human rights, including rights of women, heightening risk for violence, trafficking and stereotyping women into victims. These barriers are even more harmful to disadvantaged groups of women, such as minorities, migrant women or women with disabilities.

This session will provide an opportunity for participants to discuss these challenges. It will further provide guidance to OSCE participating States on how best to integrate diverse societies, respond to immediate and long-term needs, as well as take stock of the implementation of the relevant OSCE commitments.

Tuesday, 4 October

10.00-13.00 **Plenary Session VI: Rule of Law I**

Prevention and eradication of torture; Abolition of capital punishment; Protection of human rights and fighting terrorism

Torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment continue to be present in the OSCE region. Reasons for torture remain manifold and include structural factors in criminal justice systems that incentivize or facilitate the use of torture or other ill-treatment. OSCE participating States have affirmed the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment repeatedly, with no exceptional circumstances to be invoked as a justification of torture (Copenhagen Document 1990, Athens Declaration 2009, Budapest Document 1994, Vienna Document 1989), and to abandon and refrain from the use of interrogation techniques that constitute torture and ill-treatment, as well as to take a gender-sensitive approach in the fight against torture (MC decision Tirana 7/20).

Participating States have committed to keeping the question of eliminating capital punishment under consideration (Copenhagen Document 1990), and to exchanging information on the question of the abolition of the death penalty and the provision of information on the use of the death penalty to the public (Copenhagen Document 1990, Vienna Document 1989, Helsinki Document 2008). In line with the growing recognition of capital punishment as a cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and

punishment, the session will present the opportunity to discuss the continued global trend towards the abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances.

Ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law is a precondition also for the legitimacy and the effectiveness of States' counter-terrorism efforts. The abuse of "anti-extremism" laws and the labelling of civil society and those expressing dissenting views as "terrorists" or "extremists" in many countries across the OSCE is raising growing concerns. At the same time counter-terrorism laws across the OSCE region are being tightened with far reaching human rights consequences, including through a disproportionate or even exclusive focus on specific groups in society.

The session will reflect on the issues listed above as well as on the issue of accountability for human rights violations committed in the fight against terrorism, such as torture and other ill-treatment, as well as address the need for effective oversight of counter-terrorism efforts to prevent future violations of human rights.

Wednesday, 5 October

10.00-13.00 **Plenary Session VII: Rule of Law II**

Democratic law-making, Independence of the judiciary, Right to a fair trial, including in case of armed conflict

OSCE participating States have recognised that judicial independence should be guaranteed in law and in practice and that prosecutors should at all times respect the rule of law. (Moscow Document 1991, Brussels Declaration 2006, Copenhagen Document 1990). Moreover, OSCE participating States undertook to ensure that the legal guarantees necessary to uphold the rule of law will remain in force also during a state of emergency (Moscow Document 1991). OSCE commitments highlight the need to ensure personal accountability for violations of international humanitarian law (Helsinki Declaration 1992, Stockholm Document 1992, and Budapest Document 1994). In armed conflicts, and, within the OSCE region, in particular, in the context of the ongoing military attack of the Russian Federation on Ukraine, personal accountability and effective remedy to victims of crimes should urgently be ensured. At the same time, any defendant is entitled to a fair hearing, including in times of armed conflict. OSCE participating States also committed to formulate and adopt legislation "as the result of an open process reflecting the will of the people, either directly or through their elected representatives" (Moscow Document 1991). This cannot be achieved without the participation of all those primarily concerned, including underrepresented groups throughout the entire process. In practice, legislation throughout the OSCE region is often developed without meaningful public consultation and the law-making process lacks sufficient representation of women, national minorities, youth, and PwDs. In times of crisis or armed conflicts, such challenges are further exacerbated with authorities often being

inclined to shorten procedures, circumventing normal legislative processes, adopting laws and policy decisions in an expedited manner without any form of public consultations.

Across the OSCE region, the principles of the rule of law and independent justice system have been undermined in recent years. In some OSCE participating States, criminal trials are held excessively in closed hearings and independence of lawyers is restricted, including in the cases they represent. States of emergency both in connection to the COVID-19 pandemic and to armed conflicts in the OSCE region affected the observance of fair trial guarantees in courts. Although a state of emergency may justify some fair trial restrictions limitations should always be in line with the national and international law and be proportionate to the exigencies of the situation (Copenhagen Document 1990).

The session will explore the main challenges in relation to the observance of the right to a fair trial, including to an independent and impartial court and in relation to democratic law-making. The sessions will also cover the rule of law challenges caused by the state of emergency declared in many OSCE participating States due to the pandemic and to armed conflict

Thursday, 6 October

10.00-13.00 **Plenary Session VIII: Humanitarian Issues**

Humanitarian issues, including in the context of armed conflict; Refugees and displaced persons; Persons at risk of displacement; Trafficking in human beings

Adherence to international standards and instruments in protecting and assisting refugees, displaced persons and persons at risk of displacement, including their dignified treatment at borders and during refugee status determinations, is part of the catalogue of OSCE commitments (Helsinki Declaration 1992, Istanbul Document 1999, Sofia Document 2004, Ljubljana Document 2005). These commitments are even more relevant in the current situation when participating States face a significant increase of persons seeking protection, while also dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 on fundamental freedoms, including freedom of movement. The military attack of the Russian Federation on Ukraine that started on 24 February 2022 and the ensuing armed conflict generated one of the fastest and largest forced displacement crises since World War II in the OSCE region. In 2022, according to UNHCR, the figure of displaced people worldwide has reached over 100 million for the first time on record while the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflict and violence reached 53 million at the end of 2021. This figure does not include the over 7 million people internally displaced within Ukraine. Armed conflicts exacerbate vulnerability to trafficking, especially of women and children who are refugees and IDPs. In such situations, effective responses are required to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings.

The main purpose of international humanitarian law (IHL) is to alleviate human suffering during armed conflict by protecting individuals who are not, or no longer, participating in hostilities and by restricting the means and methods of warfare. All OSCE participating States committed to “respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of the civilian population” in situations of armed conflict, and to ensure “that those who violate international humanitarian law are held personally accountable” (Helsinki Final Act 1994). Additionally, OSCE participating States have agreed that no form of public emergency, including a state of war, a threat of war or internal political instability, can be used as an argument to disregard or undercut IHL and international human rights law (IHRL) (Tirana 7/20).

Friday, 7 October

10.00-13.00 **Closing Session**

Protection and promotion of human rights and democratic institutions in the OSCE area – current developments, trends and challenges

The protection and promotion of human rights remains an area of pivotal importance to the foreign policies of OSCE participating States and a vital aspect of the work of their Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The participating States use a wide range of relevant tools to articulate those policies, including: global and regional co-operation; initiatives, campaigns and statements in multilateral fora; and engagement delivered through public or digital diplomacy. While these activities all contribute to supporting the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic institutions in the OSCE region, these rights and freedoms are constantly being challenged, often by new developments or negative trends. This year, the military attack of the Russian Federation on Ukraine has caused a huge humanitarian and human rights crisis, effectively cutting off access to the full range of fundamental human rights throughout Ukraine, particularly in the occupied parts of the country. It also continues to have an impact on the broader situation in the immediate region and the whole OSCE area.

There has been a tradition in the past few years for MFA directors with responsibility for human rights issues to meet in the margins of Human Dimension events in Warsaw. Developing on that tradition this session, no longer in the margins but part of our core agenda, will provide conference participants with the possibility to address current trends and challenges in the area of protecting and promoting human rights. The session will offer a space for a discussion among human rights directors, taking cue from introducers’ presentations, and followed by interventions and comments made by other participants at the conference.