

Human rights are the core of comprehensive security

Op-ed by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Florian Raunig, on the occasion of the Human Rights Day, 10 December 2015

It is now widely accepted that human rights are essential to maintain peace and stability and promote sustainable development. This recognition is in significant part due to the OSCE, which was founded on the idea that true security is comprehensive, co-operative and indivisible. It is more than freedom from war; it requires respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, economic well-being and a healthy environment. A safe and secure environment is necessary to fully protect human rights. This is why besides its dedicated programmes dealing with human rights, the OSCE invests deeply in security sector reform. It is also the reason why we have established a close partnership with Albanian security sector institutions such as the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior.

The Helsinki Final Act, adopted 40 years ago, was the first such document to explicitly link security within states to security between states. It was a revolutionary idea – and one that many of the negotiators and commentators underestimated at the time. In 1975, Enver Hoxha proclaimed it “a document of 200 pages that says nothing. It commits nobody to anything.” And yet, the Helsinki Final Act began a process that contributed to the collapse of dictatorship in Europe – to the collapse of the totalitarian regime in Albania.

It transcended the ideological divide between East and West on the basis of an agreed set of principles and values that governed the behaviour of States towards their citizens, as well as towards each other. These included refraining from the use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. These principles and values are the foundation of true security: the foundation of democracy, prosperity and peace.

At the OSCE Summit in Astana in 2010, the Heads of State or Government of the OSCE participating States reiterated that “the inherent dignity of the individual is at the core of comprehensive security ... that human rights and fundamental freedoms are inalienable, and that their protection and promotion is our first responsibility.” These words must be followed by actions.

To be successful, our responses must be comprehensive as the challenges we face. This means that complex threats to security such as terrorism or organized crime cannot be addressed by law enforcement measures alone. Moreover, such threats cannot be minimized by violating human rights or fundamental freedoms. Such violations will, over time, only increase our vulnerability to threats. They will also diminish our ability to establish the partnerships necessary to respond appropriately to such threats.

The recent attacks in Paris, in the skies above Sinai and in Beirut are a timely reminder to us all. They highlight the need for a holistic approach to security, supported by effective national and international collaboration between the security sector, public institutions, the business community and the public.

True security and stability can never be achieved by emphasizing one dimension of security at the expense of another. It is only when all three dimensions – political-military, economic and environmental and human – are in balance that a country is able to thrive. And it is only

when a country develops common, inclusive goals and values that all elements of the country – government, opposition and civil society – can contribute to progress, for the benefit of all.