

Opening remarks
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Human Dimension Seminar on
Migration and Integration
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Welcome – especially to the representative of the Chairman-in-Office, Ambassador Frlec, and of our host country, Minister Switalski.

- A year ago, almost to the day, we gathered here to discuss *Democratic Institutions and Democratic Governance* and how to ensure an authentic democratic process.
- The subject of today's seminar is in fact a follow up. This time we are focusing on *cohesion* being a key element of a democratic society. Cohesion based on equal participation and representation of all individuals of any social, ethnic, gender and religious backgrounds, including *migrants*.
- We all would agree that a cohesive society relies on more than just equal opportunities for all. It relies on social conditions that enable people from all backgrounds to feel and to be included in society and to share an identity.
- Migration and immigration are some of the most hotly debated issues in Europe. Too often the immigration debate has turned into a stand-off between those who favour '*assimilation*' - the duty of newcomers to adapt the values, culture, and norms of the 'host society' -, and those who advocate an approach based on '*multiculturalism*' -a framework which protects the rights of different ethnic or religious groups.
- Focusing instead on **integration** enables us to move beyond this debate, and to develop a common and inclusive approach. An approach deriving from a society which is built around rights and responsibilities and promotes commonalities rather than differences.
- In a diverse society, inevitably there will be differences in values and ambitions. But the respect for freedom means that no one set of cultural values should be rated higher than another – with one exception: respect for human rights and the rule of law, both essential elements of a democratic society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- As you know, this year's OSCE Chairmanship, Slovenia, had chosen the topic of *Migration-Integration* as its overall theme. In other words, the Slovenian Chairmanship proposes to address the issue in a comprehensive manner, through all the three dimensions of the OSCE, from the political, economic and human rights points of view.
- Today's Seminar is an important element in this comprehensive approach: to address the complex issue of integration of migrants from the human dimension perspective. This means, in essence, to discuss how to best ensure the protection of the human rights of migrants and their efficient and harmonious integration, to the benefit of both the receiving society and the migrants themselves.

- While this is a new approach for the OSCE and a first for a HD Seminar, the issue of *migration* has been on the agenda of the OSCE from its CSCE beginning, in the Helsinki Final Act. We only have to take a look at the compilation of commitments to remind ourselves of this fact.
- Since then, the OSCE has addressed a number of migration-related topics, such as family reunification, labour migration, plight of refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and formerly deported peoples. This clearly testifies to the fact that this is a dynamic and rich topic which has numerous demographic, economic, and security connotations.
- Yet, the human dimension is at the core of it all: it is individual human beings that we are talking about, human beings who make a move, human beings who seek a new home, human beings who need a new community to belong to. And it is precisely these factors which all too often remain elusive:
- Social divisions and inequality are in part due to the lack of rights experienced by many immigrants, especially in the early stages of settlement, or lack of effective protection of their human rights. It is essential for social integration that immigrants enjoy full human rights and have equal access to the legal system.
- But we have to look beyond legal safeguards. Migrant groups being marginalized benefits no one. Marginalized groups harbor resentment; and at the same time society develops the feeling that these groups threaten its identity. This leads, all too often, to a vicious cycle of even more marginalization. Integration is clearly the way to deal with this marginalization.
- There are many ways to move towards integration. We hope that in the next three days we can identify and specify some of these. At ODIHR we are supporting governments and societies on a number of aspects of integration: Improving systems of population registration, enabling access to social benefits and programmes for all legal residents, combating hate crimes, or programmes to ensure that everyone gets a fair trial in a court of law – in all of this, we are contributing, in one way or another, to strengthening inclusive, cohesive democratic societies.
- The proposed approach for this Seminar is to look at integration of migrants as a two-way process, which affects both migrants and the receiving society. It is not simply adapting newcomers to the host society; it's also about adapting the society to be able to open up to newcomers. Therefore, we look forward to discussions of those responsibilities that migrants have vis-à-vis the host society as well as legal, political and socio-cultural frameworks that the host society should create to ensure their integration.

- Four working groups will provide an opportunity to review experiences of OSCE participating States on the issues of inter-state and intra-state co-operation, on issues of legal status and human rights of migrants, on participation of legal migrants in public life, and on socio-cultural aspects of integration, including issues of tolerance and non-discrimination.
- We all have something to learn from each other. There is migration and there are migrants in all corners of the OSCE region. No participating State is a migration-free zone. Migration affects everybody, also beyond the OSCE area, and we look particularly at the active participation of our Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation in our debate. Our deepening ties and interdependence bring more migration, not less.
- This Seminar will contribute to a vision of how to move forward. We want to bring the results of your work to the Economic forum, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, and to the Chairmanship's preparations for the Ministerial Council. I wish you three interesting and productive days.