

Address by Krystyna Żurek
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in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland

at the Opening Session
of the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar
(Warsaw, May 13, 2013)

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman,

On behalf of Minister Henryka Mościcka – Dendys, Undersecretary of State in the MFA, who unfortunately was not able to join us today, I have the pleasure to welcome you to the annual Human Dimension Seminar in Warsaw. I am particularly pleased to welcome distinguished representative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Ms. Isabel Santos and the Chairperson of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk. It is always a great pleasure to welcome Ms. Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Poland values your incessant efforts in promoting freedom of speech and defending journalists' independence and safety. I wish to ensure you about full support of my country for you and the Office. We appreciate your professionalism, commitment and enthusiasm.

At the same time I wish to praise the Ukrainian Chair of the OSCE for having placed the issue of freedom of speech high on the agenda of this year Organisation activity in the human dimension. I recognise that it is not an easy task to accommodate different views of participating states and would like to thank for your determination in bringing together the OSCE countries to discuss this fundamental theme. We wish you all success in your endeavours, not only in the human dimension activities, but also in dealing with range of challenges our organisation faces nowadays, including the Helsinki +40 process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democratic societies. It plays a pivotal role in the protection and promotion of the rule of law, democracy and good governance. The role of journalists in exercising control over the government and different branches of power could not be overestimated. Freedom of expression however is often being curbed, restricted or violated, despite its reaffirmation in many important international instruments and

declarations, including the OSCE commitments. Furthermore, era of globalization and rapid expansion of electronic media and the internet brings new challenges to the freedom of expression, which require our utmost attention.

The OSCE as one of the leading international organizations in promoting freedom of speech must be ready to recognize these new developments. It is regrettable therefore that for two consecutive years we were not in a position to agree to reconfirm our obligations in the field of the freedom of speech and acknowledge that they remain equally applicable to the new media.

Poland as a member of the OSCE and UN family and current president of the Human Rights Council, supports efforts that promote freedom of expression and raise awareness of the significance of the free media environment and takes part in activities aimed at improving guarantees for reporters' safety. Our experience accumulated in the period of democratic transformation is of crucial importance in this regard. Let me mention in this context our engagement in support of media freedom and journalist independence in the framework of the Eastern Partnership and assistance to the various countries in transition for example through "Democracy lessons-learned" workshops for journalists, held inter alia in Myanmar last year. Additionally, let me use this opportunity to underline good results of the conference "Safety of journalists – current challenges", held in Warsaw 3 weeks ago. It provided ample opportunity for discussions and exchange of views on safety of journalists which is an indispensable precondition for securing freedom of the media. The meeting attended by government officials, journalist, representatives of civil society and academia, was also an element of the World Press Day celebration and an important contribution to the ongoing debates in international fora on safety of journalists. The conference was organised in co-operation and with invaluable support of Austrian and Swiss governments. In light of the next year OSCE Chairmanship in Office it is encouraging to see engagement and dedication of our Swiss colleagues in fostering freedom of speech.

Concluding, I would like to add my word of thanks to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for facilitation of our debates during the seminar. Let me also remind you that the first day of our deliberation will end up with the traditional reception hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Thank you for your attention.