

Opening Remarks

**by the Representative of the Greek Chairperson-
in-Office,
Amb. Nicolaos Kalantzianos,
Head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force**

2009 HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to address, on behalf of the Greek Chairperson-in Office, the opening session of 2009 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

Ever since the Helsinki Final Act, the then Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its successor, the OSCE, have made a significant contribution to the stability and security of Europe. Respect for and promotion of democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms, good governance and the rule of law are core principles of the OSCE Human Dimension and cornerstones of stability and security in Europe and beyond. We must continue to strive to guarantee the implementation of the human dimension commitments we have undertaken, to draw attention to shortcomings in their implementation and,

if need be, to stand ready to further develop our common OSCE *acquis*.

Let me add, that the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is important as it provides a unique opportunity for representatives of Governments, international organizations and civil society to share experiences, identify shortcomings and support progress in light of our human dimension commitments. No one can deny that civil society can play an important role in guaranteeing the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Greek Chairmanship values the fact that the pluralism of this setting further contributes to this end.

Now, I would like to briefly make a number of points relating to the Greek Chairmanship's priorities in the Human Dimension.

Greece, following the relevant Helsinki Ministerial Decision, felt it was quite appropriate to set the area of **the rule of law** as one of its thematic priorities in the Human Dimension for 2009, acknowledging that this is the legal foundation of democracy, the basic prerequisite and the indispensable framework for the enjoyment of human rights.

The OSCE, having been instrumental in the process whereby states have entered into such commitments, has an equally vital role to play in the implementation phase, both by monitoring such implementation and

by providing expert assistance to States that need it. Our objective must be nothing less than turning the whole OSCE area into a rule-of-law area.

Second, in the field of **tolerance and non-discrimination**, the participating States of the OSCE have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to combat crimes motivated by racism, xenophobia, and all other forms of intolerance – broadly known as **hate crimes**. This year's Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, which focused on effective implementation of hate crime laws gave us the chance to deepen our understanding, and improve our responses to this phenomena. It is important to step up our efforts to ensure that intolerance and any form of discrimination in the OSCE region are effectively and comprehensively dealt with. In this regard, the Greek Chairmanship is looking forward to the forthcoming meeting for National Contact Points on hate crimes in Vienna this October, signaling an encouraging step in the right direction. The concrete co-operation among the focal points complements the valuable network of OSCE institutions and structures, including the three Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office on Tolerance and Non-discrimination.

In the same field, the rights of **Roma and Sinti** have also been given emphasis this year. It is true that while the respect for the civil and political rights of the Roma has improved, somewhat, over the years,

serious problems remain. In short: the Roma and Sinti are not yet able to “play a full and equal part in our societies” and “discrimination against them has not yet been eradicated. It is clear that sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by Roma will not come about without their direct involvement and empowerment, and their assumption of responsibility. As the 2003 OSCE Action Plan calls it: “*For Roma, with Roma*”.

Dear participants,

The promotion of **gender equality** is yet another thematic priority that the Greek Chairmanship has set for this year. Over the past decade, the world has seen much progress in setting standards and passing laws regarding equality between the sexes. While the importance of these advances should not be overlooked, the *de facto* status of women throughout the OSCE region has not sufficiently improved to the point of achieving parity with men. In fact, the gap between legal equality and actual equality needs further decisive efforts on the part of the participating States. We must work to ensure continued efforts to promote equality between women and men across the OSCE region, and also make a more concerted effort to prevent violence and discrimination against women. It should be also stressed that gender issues are not to be dealt only within the human dimension in the OSCE as they are inherent in all OSCE activities:

both across the three dimensions and within the Organization itself.

Finally, let me note the many **elections and election-related activities** within the OSCE this year. Many more elections are to follow across the OSCE region in the months to come. OSCE election observation is clearly a valuable tool in building public confidence in the election system of a country and through this in further developing and fortifying its democratic system.

We should all appreciate the fact that election observation has, over the years, become such an important OSCE activity, that our Organization can indeed provide valuable expertise and contribute meaningfully in the efforts of third countries in this field, as was the case with Afghanistan this year, which extended a relevant invitation to the OSCE.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to refer briefly to the Corfu Process and to the efforts of the Chairmanship to help lay the foundations of a structured dialogue about European Security and about the future of our Organization. It is clear that the Human Dimension is an essential component of this process. The Chairmanship looks forward to the contribution of the Institutions – the ODIHR, the High Commissioner and the Office for Freedom of the Media – in the relevant discussions

that will soon take place in Vienna. They will doubtless draw important conclusions from the proceedings of our Meeting here in Warsaw.

In concluding, I would like to thank Ambassador Lenarcic and the whole team of the ODIHR for the organization of this meeting.

I challenge us all to make sure that this two-weeks' long Meeting fulfils its objectives: it is not only an opportunity for an open exchange of views, as important as this is; it should also enable us to take concrete and credible results and recommendations forward to this year's Ministerial Meeting in Athens, and back to capitals, in order to help participating States effectively fulfill the promises they have made, to each other and to their citizens.

Thank you for your attention.