



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Ambassador Janez Lenarčič

As prepared for delivery by Deputy Chief of Mission Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Ambassador Lenarčič, welcome back to the Permanent Council and thank you for your report. As this is your last scheduled appearance before the Permanent Council allow me, on behalf of the United States, to say thank you for your dedication and commitment to the values of ODIHR and the OSCE. In line with ODIHR's mandate, the Director must have the independence and fortitude to engage in objective fact-finding regarding the participating States' implementation of their OSCE commitments. You have done this well and we thank you.

On a personal note, I will remember the acclamation with which you were selected by your colleagues in this body as a highly esteemed representative of this organization. Your work at ODIHR – like that of your predecessor Ambassador Strohal – sets the standard for integrity, objectivity and courage.

As you noted in your remarks, Ukraine is currently front and center in our minds and our work—and this is no less true of ODIHR. The crisis in Ukraine underscores yet again why a financially sound and professional ODIHR is necessary. We thank you and your team for the rapid response in developing tailor-made projects to support human rights monitoring in Ukraine and, more generally, for ODIHR's capacity and willingness to assist participating States whenever invited and funds are allocated.

The fact that the ODIHR/HCNM Human Rights Assessment Mission to Ukraine was almost immediately fully funded from participating States' voluntary contributions is a testament to the urgent need for the project, as well as the faith we have in ODIHR and the HCNM to carry out this work. It shows that the OSCE and its institutions have a critical role to play in addressing the situation in Ukraine. We are pleased that this joint mission was quickly on the ground and is already working to assess facts and promote full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in line with the ODIHR mandate. The mission also is consistent with the HCNM mandate to provide early warning and, as appropriate, early action in response to tensions involving national minority issues that have the potential to develop into a conflict within the OSCE area. We look forward to timely assessments and recommendations from the monitors on the ground. We also encourage ODIHR to develop additional projects in Ukraine, as needed and if requested by the Ukrainian government. The U.S. commits to seek short- and long-term financial resources to support robustly your work and the work of all elements of the OSCE in Ukraine.

The crisis in Ukraine and your efforts to address it remind us that the ODIHR's mandate is to help OSCE participating States to “ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and ... to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society”. We call on all States to support ODIHR’s work and to provide the necessary financial support to allow ODIHR to carry out its agreed mandate.

ODIHR’s election observation activities remain the gold standard. ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly deliver internationally recognized expertise to observation missions. Last week we heard all of the candidates who seek to be the next ODIHR Director praise ODIHR’s election observation methodology and state that the methodology must not be weakened. We are also pleased to see ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly speaking with one OSCE voice on elections and working together on other projects as well. We look forward to ODIHR’s monitoring of critical elections this spring and will continue to support these efforts through seconded observers.

We are pleased to hear about ODIHR’s new project to combat hate crimes in Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. We commend these EU member states for undertaking this important whole of government project.

Ambassador Lenarčič, it seems that every year we ask for your patience as participating States debate the Human Dimension event calendar. We recognize that ODIHR needs an agreed calendar in order to plan for and execute meaningful events. At the same time, we must ensure that the package of Human Dimension events reflects a strong commitment to protecting and implementing human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United States shares ODIHR’s desire to bring together representatives from civil society and governments to hold participating States accountable and promote our shared commitments.

Thank you again for your report today and for your team’s contribution to our security community. The United States looks forward to ODIHR’s observation of our own elections in November of this year, and to ODIHR’s continuing examination of issues related to human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination wherever they arise, including in the United States.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.