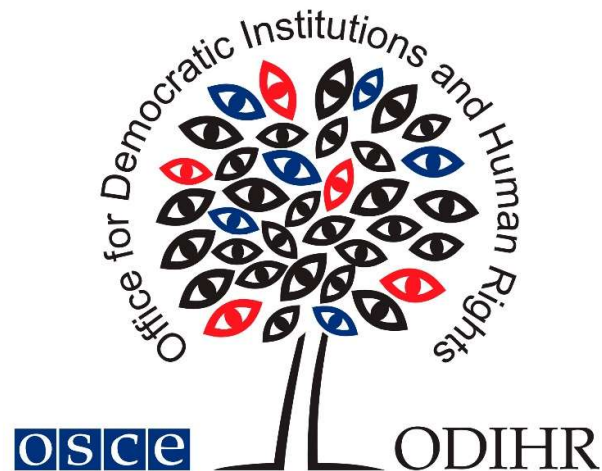


# 1448<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Permanent Council

2 November 2023



Address by

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**Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions  
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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my sincere pleasure to address the Permanent Council this morning to continue to advance our dialogue, and share with you a number of reflections on ODIHR's important work and on the value today of our common human dimension.

Allow me to start by expressing my sincere gratitude to Ambassador Igor Djundev and the North Macedonia OSCE Chair-in Office for the close and fruitful cooperation we have enjoyed throughout this year. Your strong commitment to keep the human dimension as a crucial priority for the OSCE, despite all the challenges, has been a constant and concrete support for our work – including through the successful holding of three supplementary human dimension meetings.

I would like to also thank Ambassador Callan and the Irish team for leading the Human Dimension Committee with remarkable vision, dedication and commitment in 2023. Your work contributed to raise awareness on important parts of our human dimension, and we look forward to continue this successful approach with the next chair.

All these efforts, alongside the excellent work of the Representative for the Freedom of the Media and the Office of the High Commissioner for National Minorities – whom I thank for the close co-operation we maintain and advance –, must strengthen our conviction that human rights and democracy must remain fundamental features of our common security objectives. I wish to also thank the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary General for the close cooperation and valuable support we continue to share.

The second Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, organized in the Polish capital last month by the North Macedonia CiO with the support of ODIHR, is a powerful reminder of how any discussion about security in our region is ultimately ineffective if the human rights of people, their fundamental freedoms and the democratic aspirations of our societies are not fully embraced.

Over the two weeks of the conference, we welcomed representatives from 49 OSCE participating States, nearly 1,400 registered participants, including more than 600 civil society representatives and human rights defenders, with over 230 official statements and documents submitted, and 79 side events organized on an equal number of topics – 46 of which organised by CSOs.

For a conference planned over the span of only 2 months, these are impressive numbers which testify to the demand that exist and to the value of such a unique platform. And it urges us to commit once again to hold the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, ending the unfortunate inability to ensure its organizations for the past three years.

For ODIHR the opportunity to interact, engage, and discuss on crucial human rights concerns and development in our common region is extremely precious and valuable. In particular, civil society voices provide us with crucial insights into issues on which governments and international institutions are sometimes unable to respond quickly and effectively. We thank them not only for the expertise they provide, but also for their courage and determination to shed light on human rights abuses wherever they take place.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the conference it was clear that we continue to face severe security challenges across our region, with a direct impact on OSCE commitments, international human rights frameworks and standard. Indeed, the human dimension has not emerged only as a relevant factor throughout the discussions – instead, human rights violations and the undermining of democratic standards rest at the very heart of all these crises.

A year and a half since the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine we continue to witness tragic loss of innocent lives, human suffering, broken futures, and a deep sense of insecurity for millions of people. For these very reasons, we continue to monitor grave human rights violations in Ukraine, including against children and the most vulnerable, urging their immediate end. This work and message will remain a priority for ODIHR.

Also, we have seen the unfolding of the humanitarian crisis affecting Karabakh Armenians, and called for the need to ensure respect of their human rights in line with international law and the necessity to guarantee humanitarian assistance. All parties involved must be guided by a strong human rights approach. ODIHR stands ready to assist this process, through its monitoring expertise as well as its legislative advice tools.

We are also deeply alarmed by reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hate incidents that are significantly raising in numbers across the OSCE region, in the wake of the horrifying events in the Middle East. Mutual respect and understanding, even in times of crisis, distress and polarized political discussions are essential, and we call on all OSCE participating States to remaining vigilant against any manifestations of hatred against minority communities, as these efforts are and will be paramount for preventing instability within our own societies.

These issues were extensively discussed by all participants at the conference, alongside concerns for the growing dangers human rights defenders experience across our OSCE region today, the quality of rule of law and fair trial standards, limitations to religious freedom, and the need to better protect rights of communities and under-represented groups – including women and persons with disabilities.

At the same time, the conference offered also remarkable instances of dialogue and accounts of progress. These saw, for example, the positive engagement of national human rights institutions, the promotion of new tools such as in the field of independence of the judiciary and election management, in addition to the sharing of inspiring work done by refugees and migrants towards fostering inclusion, and the power of alliances in combatting human

trafficking. Amidst the security crises we witness, it is important to remind ourselves of the numerous positive initiatives and developments that take shape across our region, improving people's lives and their rights.

In all these areas of our human dimension, ODIHR stands ready to assist you, the OSCE participating States, and remains a repository of knowledge and expertise.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

After three years holding this position as ODIHR Director, allow me to share a reflection on the reasons why – in my view – this Office is truly unique, greatly needed, and a bedrock we cannot afford to undermine.

First, ODIHR as a unique platform. The work we do with authorities, human rights defenders, civil society, other international partners – often creating conditions for their meaningful cooperation – is constant and tangible. We bring them together in structured processes of dialogue, we create safe spaces to raise human rights concerns and violations, we make sure marginalised groups also have a voice. Such a multi-stakeholder dialogue is essential today to bridge growing differences, reduce tensions, and in itself a powerful process to address security crises.

Second, ODIHR and its programs. Ever since I arrived at ODIHR in the winter of 2021, I remain genuinely impressed by the number and variety of programs the Office is able to deliver, the quality of its assistance, despite the diminishing resources available. They provide real support, in quality of legislation, in building capabilities of national authorities, in improving electoral processes, in monitoring human rights guarantee and violations, reporting on hate crimes, as well as rule of law standards. They make a steady, incremental difference. And they need your support.

Third, ODIHR and its people – the impressive and inspiring commitment, professionalism and technical knowledge the whole staff in Warsaw puts in practice everyday towards making our human dimension stronger. I wish to acknowledge their dedication, and remind us of the excellent opportunity participating States have to engage with them and benefit from their experience. With over 30 years of history, ODIHR's unique ability in all areas of our mandate, on the basis of dialogue, positive engagement and constructive criticism, must be not only preserved, but empowered.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we approach a delicate juncture for our organization, we must not lose sight that all this is at stake.

Our commitments to human rights and democracy represent a fundamental part of the global security architecture. And this, our common human dimension – I would argue – is what makes

the OSCE a truly remarkable vision, able to create over decades an outstanding democratic legacy in our region, with strong legal frameworks, political mechanisms and accountability instruments to protect human rights and freedoms and increase gender equality.

Weakening the human dimension to the benefit of short-term solutions to today's challenges and security crises would be a grave mistake. On the contrary, it is the vision of a better life for every individual based on democracy and human rights that must continue to offers us the courage and compass to overcome today's difficulties.

In this moment of collective responsibility, we cannot allow for the human dimension of the OSCE to be sacrificed, as it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to rebuild it as it is now.

ODIHR embodies this vision concretely – pragmatically. As you know, we are very open to engage with all of you. As we often include constructive criticism while delivering our assistance, we are also ready to listen to yours. As I have mentioned before, no country has a perfect human rights record. Democracy, rule of law, and working towards building tolerant societies free from discrimination, are a constant and everlasting aspiration, one that requires persistent vigilance, adjustments, as well as dedication.

Despite persistent challenges connected with the lack of an approved budget, ODIHR has been capable of advancing this important work, expanding its scope of assistance – both geographically and thematically –, and continuously updating its methodologies and skills. Indeed, we also strive to learn ourselves from the experience and expertise of you participating States, the civil society in your countries and other actors, always with the goal of finding sustainable solutions.

In practice, we maintain and foster constructive, and fruitful, dialogue with nearly all Participating States. For this, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for the appreciation and support – both institutional as well as financial – we regularly receive from the overwhelming majority of you.

Personally, I feel privileged every day for the opportunity to lead ODIHR and contribute to the implementation of its unique mandate.

As we approach the end of this complex year, we must be clear about the responsibility that we all have in preserving and improving the ability of ODIHR to fully deliver on this mandate, as an essential element in building a better and safer future for our region.

This work is clearly not yet finished – we all know it.

I do trust in our shared commitment to move it forward.

Thank you – and I look forward to hearing your questions and reflections.