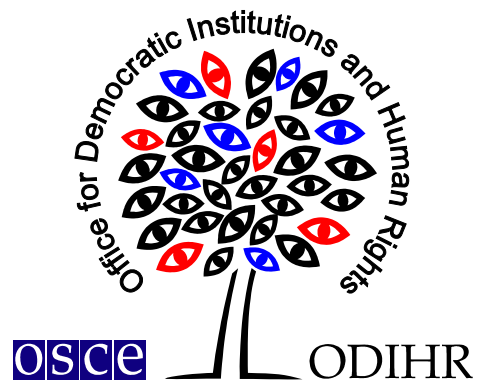


Address by Ambassador Christian Strohal,
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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Honourable Members of the PA,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address – for the first time – the Annual Session of the Parliamentary Assembly.

With this year's Session – devoted to “The Role of the OSCE in the New Architecture of Europe” – the Parliamentary Assembly makes a welcome contribution to the ongoing Organization-wide discussion on where the OSCE's place should be in a changing security environment and how the Organization can best contribute to global efforts to address the threats and challenges we are facing at the beginning of the 21st century.

In developing new strategies, we must always keep in mind that the OSCE's unique comparative advantage, and a prime reason for its success, is its comprehensive approach to security. The OSCE area is the only world region which has an international organization at its disposal that addresses security in a comprehensive, multi-dimensional way, linking the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions of security. It is essential that this comprehensiveness – and the key role the human dimension plays in the OSCE's security concept – is not put into question, a point that was also underlined at last week's OSCE Annual Security Review Conference.

Likewise, we must ensure that any “re-balancing” of the three dimensions, as is currently under discussion, must not be done at the expense of the human dimension. There certainly is a need to expand the first two dimensions. But the OSCE's work on the human dimension, notably through the work of the ODIHR, forms the very basis for work in the other two dimensions. Without progress here, there is little hope for any lasting progress in the other two.

The ODIHR, as you know, is the OSCE's specialized institution for the human dimension. It is tasked with promoting democratic elections, strengthening democratic institutions, and protecting and promoting human rights. The underlying philosophy of pursuing these goals is that democracy

and the protection of human rights are the best guarantee for creating fair and open societies, thereby preventing possible human security threats from emerging or from causing harm to the stability of the OSCE area.

We are faced with numerous challenges in our focus regions. The South Caucasus currently goes through a cycle of important elections, some of which may result in a change of political leadership. Central Asia remains an area of strategic interest – and a region of great opportunities – where we hope to be able to continue to actively assist governments to comply with their commitments. In South Eastern Europe, even though much still remains to be done, there is a trend towards fundamentally changing the nature of the international involvement in the region. This is done in anticipation of a greater EU role, but leaves gaps in some areas that need to be filled. Many issues the ODIHR is dealing with are not confined to particular regions, but are relevant to the entire OSCE area, e.g. trafficking in human beings, terrorism, intolerance, and election-related challenges. This has been reflected in our activities, and the ODIHR will continue to address human dimension issues throughout the whole OSCE region.

While the ODIHR is best known for its election observation work, we have over the past years developed an impressive portfolio of an annual total of about 100 democratization and human rights projects designed to improve basic human security and promote institution-building across the OSCE region. The ODIHR's activities cover such areas as the rule of law, combating torture, the fight against trafficking in human beings, migration and freedom of movement, gender equality, civil society, freedom of religion and tolerance, Roma and Sinti issues, as well as anti-terrorism.

As there is too little time to give you a more comprehensive overview of the whole range of ODIHR activities, I will limit myself to a few illustrations of our work in these areas.

In the field of **anti-terrorism**, the ODIHR implements projects addressing the root-causes of terrorism and extremism, and seeks to ensure that anti-terrorism measures taken by participating States fully comply with OSCE commitments and international human rights law. The ODIHR's anti-terrorism co-ordinator analyses anti-terrorism legislation and its impact on human rights, monitors developments related to the fight against terrorism, and provides technical assistance to OSCE States in support of drafting or improving anti-terrorism legislation. Just recently, the ODIHR was asked by

several Central Asian states to provide assistance with bringing their anti-terrorism legislation in line with international standards.

As part of our **anti-trafficking** activities, we implement a wide range of projects, e.g. on establishing trafficking hotlines, and assist OSCE states in developing anti-trafficking legislation and national referral mechanisms to improve victim and witness protection. The ODIHR anti-trafficking unit also provides expertise to field missions and acts as a clearinghouse. Regionally, our focus is on countries of origin as well as on countries of transit and destination.

The situation of **Roma and Sinti** remains extremely unsatisfactory in many OSCE countries. The OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues continues its efforts to bring all relevant actors together and find durable solutions – be it at local, national or international level. The Contact Point can react flexibly to emerging crises and has in many cases mediated on the ground to dissolve tensions between Roma and non-Roma populations or the local authorities. The Contact Point's active role in dealing with the tensions surrounding the Roma refugees from Kosovo trying to cross the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is only the most recent example.

The increasing use of the Internet, even in parts of the world where access is impeded by political or economical factors, has made the World Wide Web an ideal tool for disseminating information to as wide an audience as possible. This is still under-estimated by legislators and policy-makers, which has led the ODIHR in 2002 to launch **Legislationline.org**, an online legislative database providing access to international standards and domestic legislation from OSCE countries on a range of human dimension issues. This database was created to support law reforms in the OSCE region by providing lawmakers with an overview of how the same issues are addressed in different countries. This is a pioneer tool, which has already made its track records, especially with legislators from South Eastern Europe on issues such trafficking in human beings or elections. An innovative thematic index, direct access to relevant excerpts (instead of full-text version), and the possibility to narrow down one's search to specific legal issues make this tool unique on the web. I would strongly encourage all of you to visit the site (www.legislationline.org), and to make it known in your respective countries.

Let me also say a few words on **elections**, an area where we have the closest co-operation and overlap with the work of the OSCE PA. This autumn, we are facing an extremely busy election schedule, including parliamentary elections in Georgia, the Russian Federation and possibly Croatia, and presidential elections in Azerbaijan.

As part of our continuous efforts to improve our methodology, we are now more often conducting working visits during the early stages of election preparations. Such visits were made in advance of the elections in Albania in 2001, are currently being undertaken in advance of upcoming elections in Georgia and are planned before the elections in Uzbekistan in 2004. These newly emerging elements in the ODIHR election observation methodology provide new horizons.

Follow-up on the implementation of recommendations contained in ODIHR final reports has become one of our top priorities. The importance of proper follow-up, with clear political support, has been demonstrated on a number of occasions and led, for example, to the creation of a bipartisan committee on electoral reform in Albania, and the removal of problematic elements in the election legislation of Serbia and Montenegro.

In recent years, co-operation between the OSCE PA and the ODIHR on election observation has improved significantly, enhancing the credibility of the OSCE in this field. Our co-operation is based on an agreement negotiated in 1997. Provided there is sufficient political will, consideration should now be given to updating this agreement to reflect new realities.

As regards international election standards, the ODIHR, tasked by the Permanent Council, has compiled a comprehensive inventory of existing election-related norms, principles, commitments and good practices contained in various international documents. Never before has such a compilation been put together. The document is now available and will be presented to OSCE delegations for further deliberations later this month.

In conclusion, I would like to stress one point: the ODIHR and the OSCE PA share common responsibilities and objectives, and we are logical partners. We both work on issues related to democracy and elections, legislation, and implementation of OSCE commitments. We work on institution-building to develop the rule of law, good governance and civil society, and to promote human rights, non-discrimination and tolerance. We

need to look at how we can further strengthen our co-operation in a strategic perspective.

We therefore very much look forward to welcoming the PA's President, Bruce George, for a visit to the ODIHR in the near future. I would also like to renew our invitation to the officers of the 3rd Committee and all other interested members of the PA to visit us in Warsaw.

I thank you very much for your attention.