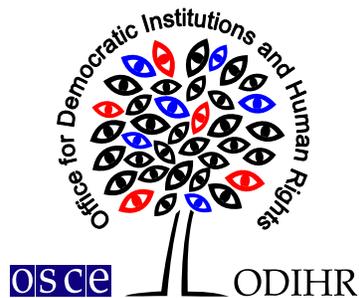


SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING

PROMOTION OF GENDER BALANCE  
AND  
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

7 May 2010

Ratsaal, Hofburg, Vienna



**Closing remarks by**

**Ambassador Janez Lenarčič**

Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

**Check against delivery!**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This first SHDM has come to an end and I would like to express my deep appreciation for the high level of attendance. With 245 participants, this meeting has been the second best attended SHDM ever convened in recent years. This in itself evidences a strong interest, within the OSCE community, in issues of women's participation in public affairs, and demonstrates that the Kazakh Chairmanship made the right choice with this topic.

Let us for a moment look beyond the figures and examine the issues. The three rapporteurs just gave us an overview of the discussions and the recommendations made during these two days. What the discussions showed is that there is no shortage of examples of how women's participation in political and public life can be enhanced in different political and cultural contexts. I am tempted to conclude that, by exhibiting the variety of models and measures that have been tested successfully in different countries, this forum fully served its purpose.

The following measures and models were discussed as having proved effective in getting closer to equal participation of women and men in legislatures and other branches of government:

- constitutional provisions for parity in electoral lists,
- voluntary or mandatory gender-based quotas for proportional representation systems, and
- all-women shortlists for majoritarian electoral systems.

Regarding the role of political parties, many examples were given of how the lack of internal democracy, the unequal access to party funds, and the lack of gender-sensitivity in candidate selection could be addressed.

However, **no strategy can work** if it is not built on a wide consensus within society at large and if it does not come as a response to a **genuine public demand**. Here is an example: when the participation of women in political parties becomes something that **matters to the electorate** and is kept under scrutiny by the media, political parties are more likely to increase the number of women on their lists and in their internal structures. A policy centered around quotas may indeed facilitate, stimulate or accompany changes, but – as I said - these changes must ultimately **reflect a public demand**, as otherwise the gains may not be sustainable.

Therefore, central to any strategy to enhance women's participation in politics are the efforts invested in **awareness raising, voter education, media campaigns**, and so forth.

Another point made by many of you is the line drawn between the public and the private sphere. The unequal relation of women and men in the **domestic setting** is regularly undermining efforts towards gender equality in public affairs. How could women be empowered to participate equally in public life if at home they are relegated to a subordinate role? Gender equality policies therefore

need to be long-term and comprehensive initiatives that impact on the **cultural, social and political levels.**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

During these two days, I have also heard critical voices. They pointed to the **gap between aspirations and facts.** They pointed to how decisive **political will** is, and how often it is lacking. The high attendance observed at this meeting illustrates a strong interest. ODIHR will continue to assist, provide expertise and share experience. But let us also keep in mind that, while this organization has developed an action plan six years ago, an action plan remains a plan only, if action is lagging behind.

With this, I wish to thank again the Kazakh Chairmanship for having put this subject on our agenda, and the moderators and introducers for their work. Let me also thank our ODIHR staff that put this meeting together under punishing timelines.

I wish you all a safe travel home.

This meeting is closed.