

Delegation of Switzerland

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF SWITZERLAND AT THE MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 June 2008

**In response to the final report by Ambassador Christian Strohal,  
Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

Mr. Chairman,

The Swiss delegation welcomes Ambassador Strohal, unfortunately for the last time in this forum, and thanks him for his impressive report at the end of his five-year term as Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). This final report provides a comprehensive survey of the achievements of all branches of the Warsaw institution. It also analyses the outstanding results achieved and the future tasks facing the ODIHR from the Director's viewpoint — constituting an important political legacy from Ambassador Strohal.

Against the background of its own experience, Switzerland can fully endorse this performance report. The Swiss delegation would like to congratulate Director Strohal warmly on these accomplishments. Let me just comment briefly on three aspects which are important for my Government and to which the ODIHR will continue to pay attention in the future.

A first remark on election observation and election assistance:

As mentioned by way of example in this report, Switzerland too, as a long-standing democracy, invited the ODIHR in the autumn of 2007 to observe and assess its national parliamentary elections, and thus fulfilled a commitment of all participating States. For the Swiss Confederation, which is proud of its federalism and its local autonomy, this was the first experience with international election observers. It was an enriching experience, and the positive, although partly critical, recommendations in the assessment report will be taken seriously in Bern and in the Swiss cantons.

A second comment on the relationship between the participating States and civil society:

The meetings organized by the ODIHR in Warsaw and Vienna on implementation and on important individual aspects of the human dimension have a decisive advantage over the discussions in the Permanent Council and in the "third committee" (the Human Dimension

Committee) in the Hofburg. In the ODIHR human dimension meetings, non-governmental organizations and other organizations of civil society from the OSCE countries are represented on an equal footing alongside governments. This openness towards non-State actors reflects and strengthens the principle of democratic transparency.

In this context, another institution of the OSCE that deserves our attention is the Parliamentary Assembly (PA), whose autonomy goes much further than that of the ODIHR. As an institution for the formation of opinion independent of governments, the PA, with its resolutions and recommendations, represents an important sounding board for the intergovernmental OSCE and a workshop for the development of new initiatives. It is at times a difficult partner for the ODIHR in its core business of election observation. However, the two institutions together complement each other admirably in their efforts to consolidate democratic institutions in the OSCE area.

And in a third connection also the ODIHR plays a significant role: in the relationship between OSCE commitments and international law.

In spite of the change in its name, the OSCE is still today an association of States resting not on norms of international law but on decisions based on political consensus, and producing not binding decisions under international law but political commitments. The relatively limited formal authority of OSCE principles in comparison with Council of Europe conventions or resolutions of the United Nations Security Council has advantages as well as disadvantages. This situation allows the OSCE, particularly in its human dimension, to agree on and implement commitments that go substantially beyond applicable international law.

Such rules — for example, in the field of activity of the ODIHR, democratic elections — can, even if initially they are not consistently applied and respected, significantly influence and promote, in the longer term, the further development of binding rules of international law. In this way the OSCE, with its three institutions, can play a pioneering role also in the development of universal and regional human rights. The ODIHR has great significance in this regard; in the last few years, under the leadership of Ambassador Strohal, it has set high standards.

In conclusion, I should like to convey to you personally, Ambassador Strohal, the special thanks of Switzerland for your tireless, creative and inspiring efforts at the helm of the ODIHR. Along with your highly qualified and motivated team, you have constantly been guided by the principles of independence, impartiality and professionalism and thus paved the way for the participating States as well as your successor to ensure a successful future of continued responsible work by this central institution of the OSCE. We offer you our very sincere good wishes for your new activities in Geneva, which is situated geographically in Switzerland.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your attention.