

Check against delivery!

HDIM 2006

Closing Plenary Session, 13 October 2006

Ambassador Christian Strohal

Director of the ODIHR

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

When I welcomed you here almost two weeks ago, we were looking forward to a good exchange of ideas, suggestions and criticisms. We expected this meeting to be a dynamic and constructive event, and I can say that I am pleased with the outcome.

This was a good meeting.

The presentations, interventions and discussions covered an broad range of issues, from encouraging achievement to areas of great concern. Our discussions ranged from the state of fundamental freedoms, via democratic institutions and the rule of law, to issues surrounding respect and tolerance in the OSCE region. Since the first HDIM more than a decade ago one can proudly point to a lot of progress in these areas. We have accumulated a wealth of good practices to share.

Let me state clearly, however, that we are far from a situation where all commitments are fully respected. Human rights abuses, electoral fraud, unstable democratic institutions, the stifling of the media, torture, discrimination of minorities, anti-Semitism, racism and other phenomena discussed over these two weeks still pose a threat to the very fabric of our societies and therefore to security and stability in the whole region.

We will soon be distributing a comprehensive written report on the meeting. So instead of providing you with a summary of the discussions of the last two weeks, permit me to share with you two observations.

First observation: given the state of affairs, the Human Dimension needs to be given more, and not less, attention. The willingness of participating States gathered around this table needs to be focused more, and not less, on implementation deficiencies. Our community of values needs to be reinforced and affirmed, not weakened. Citizens must have a greater, and not a smaller share, in the realisation of the wide-ranging promises that constitute the OSCE *acquis*.

This is, no doubt, a shared responsibility. It can only then be assumed effectively if we realize the need for genuine dialogue. At his opening speech last week, our host, Under-Secretary of State Janusz Stanczyk spoke about a culture of dialogue that

underpins the HDIM. Having followed the debates here both in this room and some of the side events, in particular those involving both States and civil society, I believe the HDIM does stand up to scrutiny in this respect.

Second observation: OSCE participating States have promised to be accountable not only to each other, but to their citizens as well. For me, the notion of inclusiveness is key in this regard. Accountability and inclusiveness are, after all, merely different sides of the same coin; its currency is called good governance. I am glad to note the energy with which civil society in our region remind governmental bodies and institutions of their obligations towards their citizenry.

We at the ODIHR have always believed that the HDIM is a unique asset of the OSCE because of its openness. Whereas the decision making bodies of the Organization are closed to the public, it is the presence of civil society and their participation on an equal footing that makes the HDIM special.

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We will now work together with the Belgian Chairmanship, the incoming Spanish Chairmanship and Delegations to take recommendations made at this Conference forward to the upcoming Ministerial Council meeting in Brussels in December, and beyond. I am confident that a number of decisions will emanate from the discussions we have had here. I am also grateful for the many ideas which we will attempt to integrate into the ODIHR's own reporting to the Ministerial Council.

I also hope that the experience of the last two weeks will inspire Delegates from participating States in their ongoing debate on reforming the OSCE and making it more effective. Not only the issues raised but also the spirit of open dialogue in which meetings are discussed and the courage and dedication of many civil society activists should be kept in mind.

I would not pay tribute to the spirit of the meeting if I would not mention that it was overshadowed by the brutal murder of one of the most prominent Russian journalists, Ms. Politkovskaya. Her death is widely seen as a devastating blow to civil society in Russia. But her determination to pursue the truth in the face of sheer and brutal reality shall be an example to all of us.

Her death is, sadly enough, not the only case where we see that the current situation for human rights defenders is far from getting any better in the OSCE area. Many challenges still exist, in particular the danger of a widening gap between human rights defenders and governmental authorities. The HDIM has to continue to function as a forum in which both sit at the same table, on an equal footing. The ODIHR will continue to facilitate this kind of interaction and will strengthen its efforts to support human rights defenders. In this regard, I also welcome the initiative of the Belgian Chairmanship to organize, after this closing plenary, a meeting among the Human Rights Directors of the 56 OSCE participating States on the issue. I encourage the

incoming Spanish Chairmanship to place an equally strong focus on these vital actors in our societies.

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As always, a few words on housekeeping: Most of you have used the electronic Documents Distribution System, accessible through the bank of workstations in the corridor outside this hall. As of last night, participants had submitted almost 700 documents to our Secretariat, amounting to over 6000 pages. I am confident that you will agree with me that our on-demand copying, along with the possibility to e-mail texts to your offices contributed to keeping everyone in the loop. 10,000 documents with 65.000 pages were sent over e-mail in the course of the past two weeks. Let me emphasise that this system was designed and implemented in house by ODIHR personnel. My deepest appreciation goes out to Zuzanna Lukaszczyk, Piotrek Stepień and Bartek Bielecki for their work on this.

Thanks also are due to Iwon Kaminska and Basia Matuszewicz, the guardians of the speakers' list, whom many of you have visited in the past two weeks. They have done an excellent job in helping the moderators bring order out of potential chaos.

Likewise, to Irek Stepinski, our Senior Conference Services Assistant, who solves problems before they even appear. And to Anna Sierant, who has again managed to produce a clear and comprehensive list of participants from your electronic registrations and a large number of barely legible faxes. To Jakhongir for looking again so well after a record number of NGOs, to Toralv Nordbo, for the overall coordination of preparations and the smooth conduct of the meeting, and to all our staff – all involved, and all appreciating occasions for concrete interaction with delegations.

And finally, to the interpreters, who have sometimes struggled to make sure that your thoughts are clearly understood by those among us who do not understand your language. Our special

gratitude goes to our Polish hosts, for our welcome not only during these two weeks for the HDIM but for hosting the ODIHR here so hospitably. I would like to extend my sincere thanks also to the Belgian Chairmanship Team, both in Brussels and in Vienna; and last but not least to my dear collaborator Nicolae Gheorghe who will leave our office soon and who has, in his time with us managed to not only galvanise the Roma and Sinti communities but has, with equal charisma, succeeded also in energising us.

I thank you all – participants, keynote speakers, moderators, rapporteurs, and note takers -- for your input and for carrying messages forward; I am grateful for the trust placed in our institution and for the many kind words we have received. I take them as a call to continue our dialogue as we develop and implement our programmes.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Concern has been raised from some that the HDIM – the most visible of OSCE’s human dimension activities – needs to be adapted to further enhance the space for debate and discussion. I agree with those propositions. We need to conduct what I have termed a thorough reality check on the state of human dimension commitments, and need to enhance it further, here at the HDIMs, and beyond, at SHDMs, conferences and, last but not least, the Permanent Council in Vienna.

Farewell, safe journey and see you again at the HDIM in Warsaw next year.