

Opening Remarks  
by Ambassador Christian Strohal,  
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Human Rights (ODIHR)

at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting  
Democratization: Strengthening Democracy  
Through Effective Representation

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**Check against delivery!**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me welcome you all to this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, the third and last of this year, on “*Strengthening Democracy through Effective Participation*”. The meeting comes at a good moment, some two weeks after the OSCE’s main human dimension event, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, and four weeks ahead of the OSCE Ministerial Council which will be held in Brussels.

The OSCE normative framework is particularly suited to this subject. The 1990 Charter of Paris for new Europe is explicit in its reference to democracy as the “only system of government” for the OSCE participating States.

There is no blueprint or a tailor-made recipe for democracy and no two democracies are identical. But there are key principles and features. It is time to dedicate a meeting to specifically address the issue of representation and of representative democratic institutions. The annual 3-hour session at the HDIM that combines the discussion of elections *and* of democratic institutions rarely touches on the latter.

A specific impulse to discussions on the processes of democratization in the OSCE was given May 2004 at the Human Dimension Seminar on Democratic Institutions and Democratic Governance; the seminar touched upon a number of subjects that we hope to follow-up with discussions here today.

Representation is one of the most powerful sources of governmental legitimacy. Only when it represents the people is a government truly *authorized* by people to take action. If people’s interests are not channelled through representative institutions we risk creating marginalized groups and multiplying discontent. Those frustrated by the absence of representation of their interests are prone to resort to means that can threaten security and stability in their country and in the entire region. Therefore, representation is an issue that reaches far beyond academic discussions of how democracies function and is a powerful illustration of why the OSCE views security as a comprehensive concept with the human dimension at its heart.

The OSCE has already given attention to the issue of representation in a number of its documents, including the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. This SHDM is an excellent opportunity to bring various aspects of this topic into the spotlight.

## **Parliaments**

The first working session will discuss proper functioning of parliaments -- the primary institutions representing ordinary citizens. Legislatures and individual legislators can play a vital role in making laws as well as in providing checks and balances to the executive branch. The oversight functions provided by legislatures are also crucial to the proper functioning of a democracy. By fully exercising their functions, parliaments help ensure that countries live up to international standards and commitments. This afternoon we hope to have a productive discussion resulting in concrete recommendations on empowering parliaments, and on the tools they need in order to fulfil their mandate.

At the side event proceeding this opening session, many of you have already heard of the outstanding work that the OSCE field operations in South Eastern Europe accomplish in assisting the parliaments of their host countries to improve their day-to-day functioning. We hope that the experiences gained in this exercise will prove useful to others and that we will hear more ideas and experiences related to the empowerment of parliaments during our discussions.

## **Political Parties**

At the second session, we will revisit the topic of political parties and their parliamentary dimension which was discussed at the 2004 HD Seminar. Political parties are vehicles for integrating views of large groups of citizens and putting them into the arena of political competition. Parties are indispensable in channelling interests of groups they represent into governmental policies and actions. Alternative political actors one can find in the real world in the absence of parties are domineering individuals, clans or oligarchic groups which cannot claim to be representative institutions.

International assistance to the political parties is seen as a delicate matter. There is no alternative to *local ownership* of the political debate. Even with this in mind, assistance to political parties – without taking sides – remains a challenge. We hope to hear views on this question during the second working session of this meeting.

## **Democratic Standards**

Perhaps one reason that discussions on democratization and representation have largely been confined to the political and academic realm is the fact that detailed standards in this area have not been developed. During the 2004 Human Dimension Seminar some speakers suggested that there is a need for more developed standards in areas such as separation of powers, accountability and transparency. Your views on this subject will undoubtedly

contribute to the debate and help the OSCE in seeing how to move forward in the implementation of the unique Charter of Paris commitment to democracy as the only system of government.

### **Law-making and access to legislation**

The topic of our third session, lawmaking and access to legislation, may at a first glance appear rather technical. Yet it illustrates well whether the institutions are truly representative and how well they interact with citizens. The manner in which laws are thought-out, drafted and adopted has significant impact on the way in which they will be implemented and enforced.

A discussion on lawmaking and access to legislation should include a broad range of issues, such as adequate law-making skills, stakeholder consultations, access of civil society to legislative deliberations, gender expertise, and representation of national minority perspectives. A flawed and inaccessible lawmaking process generally results in poor implementation, and it is poor implementation which is a main obstacle to achieving the objectives of the legislation in question, let alone rule of law overall.

Before concluding, let me briefly revert to our side-event on political parties: during the lunch break tomorrow, it will be our pleasure to present other examples of our work relevant to this SHDM. We will take the example of Georgia, where the ODIHR, together with our partners from a local think tank and the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy, assisted the main political parties to develop a dialog on key political issues. This process gave all parties an opportunity to develop appreciation for multi-party interaction. This innovative approach reflects the ODIHR's conviction that only locally-owned processes can produce genuine and sustainable reform. A book on Georgia's political landscape illustrating this approach and summarizing views of local political actors will be presented. We are hopeful we can continue this type of work in other participating States.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am glad that almost all OSCE Missions are represented at this meeting as they can rightfully claim most of the OSCE's concrete achievements in this area. We look forward to concrete input and experiences from you.

I am particularly happy that Mr. Ivan Krastev has agreed to join us today and to give a keynote address. Ivan Krastev is a political scientist who has written extensively on the subject of democratization, including a book published in

2004 entitled *"Shifting Obsessions. Three Essays on Anti-Corruption"*. He is chairman of the Board of the Centre for Liberal Strategies in Sofia. In the last decade he has been visiting fellow at St. Anthony College, Oxford; Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington; Collegium Budapest, Wissenschaftskolleg, Berlin; Institute of Federalism, University of Fribourg, Switzerland; Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna and Remarque Forum, New York. Since 2004 he has been working as executive director of the International Commission on the Balkans. He is also the Director of the Open Century Project of the Central European University in Budapest.

Before giving him the floor, let me also express my appreciation for the active role of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in fostering the principles of participation, inclusion and transparency through its members and their activities at the national level. The OSCE PA's 2005 Washington Declaration explicitly "...underlines the important role of political parties in the organization and functioning of a democratic debate and takes into account the institutional function that they perform and the essential link they provide between civil society and state decision-making bodies."

While President Lennmarker unfortunately could not join us for this meeting, I am especially happy that the Right Honourable Bruce George, President emeritus of the OSCE PA will be able to share his experience with us during the closing session.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Democracy and institution-building will always be unfinished business. There is no qualitative difference between young and old democracies, as democracy does not automatically improve with age. A number of experiences have shown that reform can progress within very short timeframes. Nonetheless, democracy has no finality, and we can and must all learn from each other. We are looking forward to hearing concrete recommendations from all of you – from experts, from representatives of States, and from civil society. I encourage you to engage actively in the discussions ahead.

Thank you.