

Vice Minister Evaldas Ignatavičius
Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship Opening Statement
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 26 September, 2011

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a particular pleasure that I may greet you all on behalf of the Lithuanian OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

I also want to thank Ambassador Lenarčič and his whole team at ODIHR for the organization of this, one of the most significant OSCE meetings of the year.

This year, as in the past, I anticipate lively and fruitful discussions, and – I am sure – many differences of opinion. That is part of debate and discussion in a free society. I also trust that these two weeks of interaction will bring forth numerous ideas and recommendations for the December OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Vilnius and for the Irish Chairmanship to follow ours.

During our chairmanship Lithuania has pursued a focused agenda built on topics identified at the Astana Summit last December.

We have, for example, sought to resolve **protracted conflicts** and to develop bilateral and regional cooperation to fight the **transnational threats** posed by international crime and terrorism. The preservation of the most fundamental human rights -- to live and work in safety, to travel to or trade freely with neighboring states, to be free from fear of violent assaults, or harm inflicted by organized criminal gangs – are addressed when we address these so-called ‘security’ or ‘cross-dimensional’ issues.

The Chairman has made it a special personal effort to meet with **civil society** wherever he has traveled to promote its active role in the systems of governance throughout the OSCE region. He believes that the importance of civil society in upholding human rights commitments cannot be over-emphasized.

The Chairman-in-Office would like to thank ODIHR for advancing our priorities in this area. Particularly I would like to underscore ODIHR’s support to National Human Rights Institutions, which, working with civil society, government offices, academia and others play a critical role in the promotion of human rights in participating States.

A major effort was made by the Chairman to promote the **safety and protection to journalists** and to foster a broader appreciation of the electronic media as part of the free media expression.

An open and inclusive discussion among politicians, media and civil society should help us agree on recommendations that need to be made in order to improve the security situation of journalists. A Chairmanship Conference devoted to the safety of journalists was held in June. Recommendations on the Safety of journalists adopted in Vilnius on 8 June serve as a basis for a Ministerial Council decision on this issue.

The rapidly developing media landscape and changing technological realities call for a new look at our media freedom commitments. OSCE commitments oblige participating States to proactively foster **plurastic media and pluralism within the media**.

I am pleased to note that the Irish Chairmanship has already announced that **freedom of the media** will remain a priority in 2012.

The Chairmanship has promoted international and national efforts to **combat hatred and discrimination against ethnic and religious groups** through special High Level Meetings in Rome, Prague and Vienna as well as through the activities and projects of our presence in the field.

From these High Level Meetings, conferences and field programs participating States have been given practical suggestions for stepping up their efforts to address intolerance and **hate crimes** in a timely and firm manner.

Pending the results of three special events focusing on various forms of discrimination and intolerance organized by the Chairmanship and ODIHR, where the agendas include public discourse as well as violence against members of particular communities, the outcome might be laid out organically in a Ministerial Council decision. The common theme of these three thematic events is, of course, the need to respond to manifestations of intolerance in public discourse. The role of education and awareness rising, including formal and non formal educational programmes, awareness raising initiatives from or for the media, civil society, political or community leaders as well as inter-religious, inter-ethnic or inter-cultural initiatives might be emphasized.

From the very outset of our Chairmanship, however, Lithuania dealt with two major, dynamic developments which continue to concern us all. The one, Human rights situation in Belarus, touches on all aspects of the Human Dimension.

The other, the events in North Africa, affecting many of our Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation and their neighbors, has occupied us as a human rights and Human Dimension partner to those who are neighbors and friends.

In light of the particularly worrisome situation in Belarus the Chairmanship a number of times called upon the Belarus authorities to remedy the situation and engage in a constructive dialogue with the Chairmanship and OSCE institutions.

The development of civil society is one of the most important conditions for development of Belarus as a democratic, legal and social state.

Fulfillment of our human dimension commitments contributes to our individual and collective security. It is with that in mind that I want to turn to my last comments today. Our Mediterranean Partner States are undergoing their own significant transformation. Their experience is not the same as ours and cannot be compared directly. But as Chairmanship, we have offered that the OSCE share our experience and provide expertise for their efforts if they request it.

Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship intends to host a Civil Society Forum in the beginning of December before Vilnius Ministerial Council. I would like to welcome all NGO representatives to participate in this event and present valuable recommendations for the Ministers of OSCE Participating States.

I wish you now good discussions, careful deliberations and practical proposals in the days ahead of you at this 2011 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.