

Address by Ambassador Christian Strohal,
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Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

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Check against delivery!

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is again a great pleasure to report to you, now for the twelfth time, on our activities at the beginning of 2007, another year which will undoubtedly prove to be an active one for my office and the Organization as a whole. Let me begin by thanking the Belgian Chairmanship, and in particular Ambassador de Crombrugghe and his dedicated team for the support they have provided us throughout 2006. The ODIHR looks forward to working with all of you, in particular with Ambassador Sanchez de Boado and the whole Spanish Chairmanship team on the activities the ODIHR will be undertaking this year.

The ODIHR will continue to implement its mandate, as the main institution of the OSCE in the human dimension, to assist participating States to implement their human dimension commitments. In this, we will continue to sharpen our tools and improve the effectiveness of the assistance we provide. A number of steps we will be taking this year have been outlined in the report "*Common Responsibility*", and I look forward to working with you in this regard, following the tasks my Office has received in MC Decision 19.

The report has our common commitments and their implementation at its core. I hope that our report has given some impetus to the discussions on how States will jointly deal with the large number of challenges still remaining in the implementation of commitments. The establishment of three Committees, one of which will examine the implementation of commitments in the Human Dimension, is an encouraging step and I am certain that "*Common Responsibility*" provides useful recommendations for their deliberations. The ODIHR is ready to provide information and support for the work of these committees. In particular, I hope that the Human Dimension committee will prove to be a forum in which States discuss the follow up to the recommendations contained in our election observation mission reports. In addition, we stand ready to provide support and input in the process of the elaboration of new commitments.

In 2006 alone, the ODIHR produced ten election observation mission reports, in addition to several dozen needs assessments, interim reports as well as preliminary findings. In addition, five assessment mission reports were published. A more detailed list of ODIHR's publications in 2006 has been circulated. All these reports contain a wealth of findings and concrete recommendations which we hope States will use to bring their elections in line with OSCE commitments. I am glad that a number of States remain in close contact with us on implementing these recommendations, although some countries prefer to deny any shortcomings rather than working with us on improvements. In line with MC Decision 19/06 and the recommendations contained in "*Common Responsibility*" we will strive to enhance our follow-up activities, not only by regularly keeping you informed about these efforts, but also by inviting public participation in follow-up efforts, seeking to involve parliamentarians, including from the OSCE PA, and engaging with States on follow-up dialogue.

All together, we deployed 2700 election observers across the entire OSCE region over the last year. Allow me at this point to thank participating States for the secondment of

observers to these elections, often during holidays and despite difficult budgetary situations in many States. It is these efforts which ensure a broad and diverse composition of our missions. We hope that this joint effort of participating States and the ODIHR will lead to concrete results and follow-up.

In 2007, we are facing a similarly busy electoral calendar. As indicated in our budget submission, we plan for up to ten full fledged Election Observation Missions and up to eight Assessment Missions. Based on the information available to us, we have circulated a draft elections calendar, which can also be found on the ODIHR website, where it is regularly updated, based also on additional information we receive from Delegations.

We have already been active. Yesterday, our first observation mission of 2007, to the legislative elections in Serbia was completed. Our mission in Albania has been deployed since mid-December following the electoral preparations for the Albanian municipal elections, now scheduled for 18 February. This week we are fielding Needs Assessment Missions to Finland and Armenia and we have just begun to deploy a team of experts to Turkmenistan for the first time to follow the upcoming Presidential elections on 11 February. A day later, we will deploy our next NAM to Moldova. We have just published a Needs Assessment Report on the upcoming 4 March Parliamentary elections in Estonia.

As we conduct these activities, we will refine and improve the delivery of our observation methodology. This includes regular dialogue with international organizations conducting observations. In this context, I am glad that we have been invited to take an active part in a conference organized by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the Parliamentary Dimension of Election Observation later this month.

I take this opportunity to remind Delegations of the two Notes Verbales sent to Delegations requesting information on access for international and domestic observers to electoral processes. We have thus far received responses from 21 participating States.

One of the core activities of the ODIHR in 2007 will be our role in the preparation and organization of human dimension events that take place throughout the year. I understand that the topics and detailed agendas are currently being determined according to the modalities adopted by this Council in cooperation with the Spanish Chairmanship.

After close consultation with the Spanish Chairmanship, we have been informed that, in line with the Chairmanship priorities, this year's Human Dimension Seminar in Warsaw in May will focus on political parties and civil society.

Topics under discussion for this year's Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings include freedom of assembly, association and expression, gender and security as well as the sexual exploitation of children.

The special days of this year's HDIM should cover combating intolerance and discrimination, Roma and Sinti issues as well as Human Rights defenders and independent national human rights institutions. I hope that this year we will again be able

to attract record participation to these important events, which represent the main point of entry for the NGO community into our Organization.

It is these meetings which give the Organization much of its public face. I have said on earlier occasions that the closed nature of deliberations here in the Hofburg limits the collective interaction between participating States and civil society to the five mandated meetings we hold every year. The steadily rising numbers of NGO participants pay tribute to the fact that there is great interest in engaging in dialogue with States at these important meetings.

We will also continue to assist States to implement their commitments under the Action Plan, including in their efforts to protect and promote women's rights, to combat domestic violence and to develop, implement and manage self-sustainable programmes promoting the equal participation of women in democratic processes. The second SHDM before the summer break should give us an opportunity to focus on gender aspects of security.

We will also continue our work in **combating intolerance and discrimination** and in promoting mutual respect and understanding. To this end, we will be consolidating the TND programme in the ODIHR to enable its stable and smooth functioning.

I welcome the particular emphasis this year's Spanish Chairmanship places on this topic and the special expertise Spain and the Chairman-in-Office himself are contributing to our endeavors. The ODIHR remains ready to provide substantive support and expertise to the Chairmanship where requested in the preparation of the tolerance-related conferences and events planned this year in this field. I would underline the importance of active participation of civil society representatives at these meetings and the need to ensure that financial support is available well in advance in order to secure the participation of a broad range of communities.

Our programme will continue to provide technical assistance to States to increase the quality, availability, and accessibility of data on hate crimes. In this regard we will explore ways of regularly assembling experts on data collection and develop tools to facilitate hate crime data reporting by participating States.

We will also in 2007 monitor and report on issues and trends pertaining to hate crimes across the OSCE region. The ODIHR's first report on Challenges and Responses to Hate-Motivated Incidents in the OSCE Region published last year will be followed by an annual report covering 2006; it will be issued at the 2007 HDIM. We intend to increase our monitoring efforts in line with last year's MC Decision 13/06.

We will continue to work on Education on the Holocaust and Anti-Semitism as well as more generally facilitate exchanges of information between experts and support national initiatives to intensify educational programmes on diversity education. In follow-up to the Roundtable Event on Representation of Muslims in Public Discourse held in 2006, the ODIHR will support the development of educational and resource materials that will

promote an increased understanding of the diverse aspects of Islam and Muslim life and culture in the OSCE region.

As in 2006, we will collect and assess existing legislation that deals with hate-motivated crimes. The ODIHR will also offer to review possible legislative proposals using the guidelines for the review of hate crimes legislation that will be developed in the course of 2007. This year we also plan to present a standard training curriculum on addressing hate motivated incidents for use by civil society groups.

Our successful Law Enforcement Officer Programme on Combating Hate Crime has been expanding to cover more OSCE States in 2006, including Poland and Serbia, and we plan to develop this further this year. A component for prosecutors and investigating magistrates is being added to the programme.

The ODIHR will continue to make full use of our Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief in assisting States by reviewing laws pertaining to freedom of religion or belief and by providing expert opinions and advice on specific cases. The Panel of Experts will also finalize an education module on international standards of freedom of religion or belief, which we plan to pilot in a series of trainings. In 2007, the Panel is planning to develop "Guidelines on Teaching about Religion at State Schools in the OSCE Region" in order to promote increased awareness and understanding among the younger generation. In this work, we will rely on our strong institutional links with other International Organizations active in this field, in particular with ECRI, EUMC, UNCERD and UNHCHR, as well as with other parts of the OSCE. The ODIHR will also continue its close co-operation with the three Personal Representatives of the CiO on Tolerance.

I note that, due to budgetary considerations, participating States may decide to replace the post of Adviser on Freedom of Religion or Belief by a secondment. I sincerely hope that this does not signal a deteriorating interest in an issue that remains far from being adequately addressed in many participating States.

As you know, the OSCE rules have forced us to separate from Nicolae Gheorghe after seven years as Adviser on **Roma and Sinti Issues**. We were fortunate enough to be able to recruit Andrzej Mirga, another experienced and widely respected personality, to fill this position. The ODIHR's Contact Point will put the implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti at the core of its activities in 2007. We are planning to present a report on the implementation of the Action Plan to Delegations in the near future.

We will also carry on mainstreaming Roma and Sinti concerns through all ODIHR programmes. This includes analyzing the participation of Roma and Sinti in electoral processes, encouraging their participation as observers, most recently in Serbia and in Albania, as well as activities on voter registration, the empowerment of Roma women and combating intolerance and discrimination of Roma and Sinti.

Our **Democratization Programme** will continue to conduct legislative reviews as well as support democratic governance practices, including efficiency and transparency in lawmaking, multi-party democracy and interaction between civil society and the state. Further, and in following up to last year's Seminar on Criminal Justice Systems, we will complete a Reference Guide on Trial Monitoring that will summarize and draw lessons from the past OSCE experiences in this area. We will also facilitate discussions on the introduction of jury trials and transfer of sanctions to arrest from the prosecutors to the judiciary.

Following the taskings from the Brussels Ministerial Council on criminal justice and organized crime to build on and consolidate the existing experience on criminal justice and organized crime we will work together with the Secretariat and produce a report this summer.

The Office will also continue its work on facilitating interstate dialogue and co-operation on labour-migration issues and the human rights of migrants. In cooperation with the Secretariat, in particular with the Office of the Economic and Environmental Co-ordinator and with the IOM, we will promote a recently published handbook on best practices in the field of labour migration. I hope that the additional dynamism given to this issue by the Brussels Ministerial Declaration on Migration can be maintained this year.

In the field of democratic governance, the ODIHR will extend and develop its activities for the enhancement of multi-party systems and inter-party dialogue. We are looking forward to organizing the annual Human Dimension Seminar in Warsaw in May of the year on the topic of political parties. We will also offer assistance on strengthening the capacities of parliamentary staff as well as the work of national policy think tanks while maintaining our support for civil society-governmental co-operation to ensure an increased role for women in decision making and political and public life. In this regard, we are also in a position to collect lessons learned from our multi-year programme for the promotion of the equal participation of women in democratic processes.

The ODIHR's **Human Rights Programme** will continue to assist OSCE participating States in fulfilling their obligations to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. To this end, the programme will work with OSCE participating States, OSCE field operations, civil society, international organizations and other partners.

One important aspect is addressing the implementation of commitments relating to counter-terrorism strategies in line with rule of law and human rights principles. This will also include work related to solidarity with the victims of terrorism. I welcome the Spanish Chairmanship's focus on this issue and we stand ready to provide input and assistance in the many related events this year, including the High Level Conference on Implementation of PC Dec. 618 planned for September.

We will also conduct an Expert level workshop on the right to life in the context of the fight against terrorism, as well as a multidisciplinary roundtable on the prevention of

radicalization and violent extremism. A consolidated version of the manual on human rights in the fight against terrorism will be finalized and published in the first half of this year.

The promotion of the human rights of trafficked persons and those vulnerable to exploitation and abuse throughout the OSCE region remains at the core of the ODIHR's work. We will further support the implementation of the concept of National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs), and develop strategies to identify, protect and assist trafficked persons, including victims of labour exploitation and those from especially marginalized communities such as Roma and Sinti. This includes supporting trafficked persons' access to justice and remedies.

We will go on with activities to promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of armed forces personnel. Following a number of specialized preparatory workshops, we aim to complete the handbook we are developing together with DCAF and publish it later this year. We aim to cover the importance of independent complaints in the next in our series of roundtables.

Further to the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and OSCE Ministerial Decision No. 14 on Women in Conflict Prevention, particular emphasis will be given to this topic in our work relating to UN SCR 1325. This also holds true in light of the planned SHDM on this important issue. Following the guidance provided by participating States in the Action Plan, ODIHR has integrated gender aspects into all the activities conducted by our different departments.

As you know, the ODIHR has established a Focal Point for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Human Rights Defenders. We will now be in a better position to support NHRIs and human rights defenders and provide relevant training as well as legislative assistance.

The ODIHR will continue to monitor developments regarding the death penalty in all 56 participating States with the aim of facilitating exchanges of information, increasing transparency, and encouraging compliance with international safeguards and will publish its annual review, *The Death Penalty in the OSCE Area*.

As part of our outreach to field operations, the ODIHR will continue its well established practice of organizing trainings for field mission staff (Human Dimension Induction Training) in Warsaw. Four such sessions are set for this year. The training continues to receive overwhelmingly positive feedback from the more than 100 participants last year, both local and international staff from almost all missions.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is by far not an exhaustive overview of our planned activities this year. It should, however, give you an idea of the many activities the ODIHR conducts. We realize that there is always room for further improving our work and making our assistance more effective, and we value your constructive comments to this end. The ever increasing demand for our assistance, the growing public interest in our reports and rising participation in our meetings show that we are well on the right track. I take this opportunity to thank those States which have contributed to our activities through voluntary contributions.

Last year, while writing the report “*Common Responsibility*” we had an opportunity to step back and take a comprehensive look to our activities and how they relate to general trends in the Human Dimension in our region. It served as a reality check and reminded us how many challenges still remain to be addressed. It has helped us focus our activities on the key question: that of implementation.

I strongly hope that this key question will also be at the centre of discussions among participating States, including in the new for a created through the committee structure. It is the shared responsibility of participating States to ensure that the OSCE remains a model for the wider international community’s search for human security.