



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Opening Statement by OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 11 September 2017

Thank you Madam Chairperson, dear Ingibjörg,
Minister Waszczykowski,
Secretary General Michael Linhart,
Dear Lamberto,
Dear Harlem,
Dear colleagues,

Yes, I am addressing the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting for the first time in my new capacity as OSCE Secretary General. It is a great pleasure to be here together with the Heads of the other OSCE executive structures, all of us jointly representing the new institutional leadership of the OSCE, and all of us committed to working together to promote the principles that this Organization stands for.

As the ODIHR Director pointed out, I am no stranger to Warsaw. I have addressed this meeting on a number of occasions, including as Chair of the Human Dimension Committee in 2011 and 2012; and as Chair of the Permanent Council during the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship in 2014.

HDIM is a unique forum, bringing together national representatives, experts and members of civil society for an inclusive debate on the state of fundamental freedoms and human rights in our region. With all its ups and downs, its difficult moments and enriching new perspectives, discussion at HDIM has often served as inspiration to further develop our commitments in the Human Dimension.

Last year, we marked a quarter-century of continuous dialogue at HDIM. In an environment characterised by low levels of trust among our participating States, it is essential that we reinforce our dialogue across the whole spectrum of issues that defines the OSCE's concept of co-operative security. In the Human Dimension, this dialogue aims at assessing the activities of the OSCE executive structures in supporting the OSCE participating States meet the full range of their commitments on human rights, the rule of law, democratic institutions, tolerance and non-discrimination. And this dialogue naturally also serves to review the human rights situation in OSCE participating States.

As the biggest European human rights forum of its kind, HDIM provides an open platform where NGOs can hold discussions with government representatives on an equal footing. Our dialogue would lose much of its value and appeal if it was not stimulated by the presence of candid and critical voices from across the OSCE area.

While some measures have been taken to help ensure that our openness is not misused for other aims, a more restrictive approach that would limit the right of entry to this meeting would be contrary to HDIM tradition and run counter to both the spirit and the letter of our OSCE commitments. It would also send the wrong signal at a time when quintessentially democratic notions such as “open society” and “pluralism” are increasingly coming under attack in parts of the OSCE area.

The openness of this event also significantly contributes to the OSCE’s ability to build partnerships with other organizations, generating synergies and enhancing our impact. In this respect, close co-ordination and co-operation inside the OSCE family is an important pre-condition for building more effective relations with outside partners. Strengthening relationships inside the OSCE and with external partners are in fact two sides of the same coin and indispensable for us to effectively carry out our many closely connected mandates.

As I said in my inaugural speech to the OSCE Permanent Council two weeks ago, we need to update and reinforce our comprehensive approach to security by breaking down the silos that too often separate the three dimensions. Instead of weighing up one against the other, we should seek to strengthen all three. This is also valid, when we talk about the budgets of different OSCE institutions. And we should develop more genuine cross-cutting and integrated approaches.

We also need to re-invigorate the wider debate on how to uphold, protect and promote our commitments in an evolving security environment that is constantly presenting us with new, complex and interconnected challenges. As we step up our efforts to find common ground and act jointly on issues ranging from terrorism and violent extremism to climate change, sustainable development and migration, one thing is clear: we must make sure that protecting the dignity of the individual always remains an integral part of our action.

I wish you fruitful and constructive discussions during the coming two weeks. Thank you.