

Human Dimension Committee

Vienna
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Closing remarks by

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Dear Ambassador Pehrman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to see all of you again, after a very intense and strenuous Ministerial Council in Hamburg. The MC usually marks the end of the political year for the OSCE, and the end of any year is usually a time of calmness and reflection.

As all of you know, the year 2016 was anything but calm. We have seen some of the most dramatic political developments in decades, some exciting, and some rather worrying, not only in the OSCE region, but also in the entire world. We have seen groundbreaking elections, the formation of new governments, promising peace treaties and terrible conflicts. We have also seen atrocious acts of terror, most recently this weekend in Istanbul and Cairo, and I would kindly ask you to join me in condemning these and extending our condolences to the families and friends of the numerous victims.

Unfortunately, we at ODIHR have also observed that 2016 was a year of a continuously shrinking space for civil society. We

observe this trend in all parts of the OSCE region, east and west of Vienna. This seems to be a collateral damage of another conflict. A conflict which is, unlike others, not fought with weapons and armour, but with words and ideas. It is an ideological battle between those in favour of universal human rights, fundamental freedoms, open societies and strong multilateral institutions tasked to defend these values, and those who use simple answers to complex questions in order to strengthen their grip on power and silence their political opponents.

Whether this phenomenon comes in the disguise of a new authoritarian populism or conventional authoritarian rule, its proponents usually equate free societies with chaos and lawlessness and use any excuse – even terrorist attacks – to tighten their grip on civil society. They try to control all civic activity, claiming that it would undermine peace and stability, and do not shy away from using illicit measures to achieve or strengthen their political control.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What the proponents of this authoritarian model fail to understand is that openness and freedom make societies more resilient and more stable in the long run, and that societies ensuring an open exchange of ideas enjoy greater legitimacy and prosperity. As you all know, this notion is at the heart of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security, and it is not only firmly grounded in universal human rights, but also has been signed and confirmed by all our participating States on numerous occasions.

It is exactly in this spirit that the Human Dimension Implementation meeting was created over twenty years ago. Since 1993, HDIM has served as a platform for participating States and OSCE Executive Structures to meet, take stock of developments and exchange ideas with both civil society and other international organizations.

The human dimension meetings' modalities task ODIHR with organizing "a Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) of all the participating States, at its seat, to discuss implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments" (PC dec. 476). Over the years, ODIHR has been fulfilling this task, having at its disposal a unit of just two full time staff members, and a *de facto* steady decrease of funding caused by the zero

nominal growth of our unified budget. At the same time, the number of participants in human dimension events has consistently grown to over 2100 in 2016 alone.

Despite increasing human and financial shortages vis-à-vis the growing size of the meetings, ODIHR stood up to the challenge and has been able to organise the professional event you as participating States expect from us. But with these shortages becoming only more acute over time, we need to seek new ways to enhance the efficiency of the organization and logistics of human dimension meetings. We also acknowledge that in comparison with other international organizations that prepare similar conferences, we are lagging behind in terms of security arrangements and that we need to find ways of preserving the open character of HDIM without compromising on security, civility and order. And finally, we believe that we should continue our work in making use of XXI Century communication and technologies to further modernise the event.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that it is important to keep in mind that HDIM is your event, and that ODIHR is organising it for the participating

States of the OSCE. We can think creatively how to improve HDIM and propose our ideas, we can give you advice what we think is possible what isn't, and what the existing modalities allow as to do and what not. But ultimately, the ball is in your court as you are the OSCE's stakeholders.

In order to be able to make some substantial proposals for this session, we have organized an internal workshop to evaluate the meetings and would like to propose some concrete solutions to identified problems, within the existing modalities and rules of procedure.

Some issues we looked at are:

- planning and preparation of human dimension meetings, including distribution of roles and responsibilities within ODIHR and the use of modern technologies,
- safety and security of the meetings,
- equal and non-discriminatory access for participants,
- innovative approaches to the organization of sessions and side events, and interactive methods to ensure greater engagement of participants

Some of the proposed solutions can be implemented within existing ODIHR resources, others would require extra funds that we currently do not have. But all of them are realistic ways of making HDIM even better and more suitable for its intended goal, to be a forum of open debate about the state of implementation of your human dimension commitments. I am going to briefly describe some of those solutions and why we believe they are important.

1.Planning and preparation of human dimension meetings:

We all know that preparing a high-quality meeting of a size and complexity of our human dimension meetings, especially HDIM, requires advance planning and preparation. It is necessary from the point of view of logistics and administration; it is also necessary to secure presence of top-notch speakers whose agenda is always planned way in advance. Needless to say, early decisions on the days and topics of human dimension meetings are of paramount importance to make all this possible for ODIHR - when we look at 2016, it was indeed a challenge to organize HDIM starting from 19 September when the agenda was adopted only 11 days prior.

Still, we can do some things internally to improve our readiness to move quickly with logistics and administration of human dimension meetings. Over the years, we have developed **considerable expertise and procedures** to deal with this problem. Despite the fact that participating States have obliged themselves to decide on the date and agenda of human dimension events sufficiently in advance, we will continue to develop our ability to react swiftly and organise the meeting as efficiently as possible.

2. Safety and security of the meetings:

In the unpredictable security environment in Europe, ODIHR is the only remaining international organization with still comparatively relaxed safety and security arrangements for a conference that has almost 2,000 registered participants. In other organizations, it has for long been a standard practice to have a registration deadline for participants so that a safety and security plan can be prepared in advance for the actual number of those registered. It has also been a standard practice to issue photo badges for participants, some with a code that can be scanned, some distinguishing between participants and

visitors, some that are time-sensitive, allowing access to just a specific part of an event - so safety and security personnel has a clear idea of how many people enter and exit premises and who these people are. ODIHR has none of the above - we have a loose registration arrangement and name badges only. This year during HDIM, for example, we witnessed a situation when some participants were giving their badges to others who were not registered but tried to enter the premises as participants nonetheless. The current system does not allow us to identify all such cases.

We therefore propose two measures that can be implemented within existing resources: **keeping a deadline for online registration of participants**, and **issuing photo badges for them**. Those who do not register by the deadline would then be issued **daily visitors' passes**. Apart from improving safety and security arrangements, this would also help us distribute the list of participants sufficiently in advance of each human dimension meeting.

Despite a chronic lack of resources, we could also look into **upgrading and modernising our online registration system** to make it easier for participants to navigate and use, and

introduce time-sensitive passes for those who come only for particular sessions or side events.

In light of regularly reappearing discussions when certain Delegations approach us because they are unhappy about certain participants, allow me to remind you that in this respect, we are strictly bound by the modalities. For example, in the 1992 Helsinki Document of the CSCE, Chapter IV, the participating States committed to "provide opportunities for the increased involvement of non-governmental organizations in CSCE activities" (para 14) and to "make open to NGOs all plenary meetings of review conferences, ODIHR seminars, workshops and meetings, the CSO when meeting as the Economic Forum, and human rights implementation meetings, as well as other expert meetings" (para 15). The participating States also stipulated that "The above provisions will not be applied to persons or organizations which resort to the use of violence or publicly condone terrorism or the use of violence" (para 16). In light of this, it should be clear that ODIHR does not have the mandate or the legal possibility to conduct background checks of the self-registered participants.

But what we can and will do is to ensure the orderly conduct of the meetings, including enforcement of our **Host country's**

privacy laws. In light of complaints that participants felt intimidated by the filming of individuals during HDIM and other events, we thus propose to **only allow officially accredited media representatives to film during sessions.** At the same time, we will continue to follow up on all credible allegations of HDIM participants being subject to intimidation, threats or reprisals against their families, in retaliation for their active participation in the HDIM. Those alleged reprisals go squarely against the letter and spirit of OSCE human dimension commitments, as well as the annual consensus-based decisions to hold the HDIM to review participating States' performance in this regard.

3. Equal and non-discriminatory access for participants:

As per Decision No. 476 of the Permanent Council of the OSCE on the "Modalities for OSCE Meetings on Human Dimension Issues", the participating States agreed that "All non-governmental organizations having relevant experience in the field of the human dimension will be invited to participate, subject to the provisions contained in Chapter IV, paragraph (16), of the Helsinki Document 1992, following registration with the ODIHR."

Up until 1994, ODIHR took measures to ensure that as many civil society organizations as possible can register, and that they send those representatives who can deliver key messages during the meetings and engage in a constructive dialogue with other participants. This was done by recommending not more than five registered participants per civil society organizations - and indeed it worked well and became a known practice so ODIHR stopped writing this recommendation.

However, recent years have brought new challenges. One is financial - as we indicated in our updated 2017 UB proposal, with continuous zero nominal growth vis-à-vis ever-increasing numbers of participants, we might be forced to limit the space available for human dimension meetings. Another is quality versus quantity - in the reality of an ever shrinking space for civil society, the dynamics at human dimension meetings are also changing. Increasingly, civil society organizations which can afford to come to the meetings are those with access to state funds. With an ever-growing number of participants and this resulting in a very limited speaking time, and with old-fashioned speakers' list where participants have to enter themselves in person, it creates a misbalance of voices that can be represented at human dimension events.

Thus, as a measure to ensure greater diversity of voices, we propose to **re-introduce the practice of up to five participants per civil society organization**, in a hope that it will increase the number and variety of organizations represented at human dimension meetings and encourage meaningful contributions while allowing us to accommodate all organizations interested in participating.

Another measure which could be considered is giving priority on the speaker's list to those individuals and organisations who haven't spoken in the course of one event. With such a provision, which I believe is in line with PC Decision 476, we would ensure greater diversity of opinions and make the meetings more interactive. **With further resources**, we could make this possible through **digitalising our speakers' list**, linking it to the registration system, for greater ease of use and transparency.

4. Innovative approaches to the organization of sessions and side events, and interactive methods to ensure greater engagement of participants

The nature of sessions has been increasingly political, not thematic, and confrontational rather than focused on dialogue - which can be partly attributed to the practice of reading pre-written statements when other forms of engagement are rather limited. To respond to this, ODIHR has progressively focused on a thorough preparation of moderators for each session. But more is needed to further improve the focus of the sessions on their thematic topics and respond to conflicts when they occur during human dimension meetings.

Also, in recent years, ODIHR has been able to offer several modernizations to the human dimension meetings. For example, we introduced the Twitter and Commitments wall, live-streamed HDIM and developed a mobile application for the event. We will continue these efforts to carry HDIM and other human dimension events to a wider audience through the use of new technologies.

Given the growing interest in side events during human dimension meetings, in recent years we modified the method of their booking to an open online system. This innovation was very well received; however, it soon became clear that the

interest in organizing side events is far greater than the space we can offer. This year and last, around 100 slots available for HDIM side events were reserved within the first 60 minutes after the booking system was opened. As we indicated in our updated 2017 UB proposal, the continuous zero nominal growth might force us to introduce further space limits.

Thus, we will provide an **advanced moderation and mediation training for all our senior staff members** who moderate or are otherwise involved in sessions. We propose to continue - and widen if possible - **this year's debate format** where this format could bring additional perspectives on sessions' topics. We will try to expand this year's good practice of **additional space for side events outside of the meetings' venues** (such as the event at the POLIN Museum of Jewish History in Warsaw), by seeking partnership with leading academic and cultural institutions who could host thematic events. We can also propose to **engage participants through photo quotes and short videos** that can be distributed together with other materials from the meetings. We would also welcome your proposals for cultural events, human rights debates and other formats that you could organize in parallel to human dimension events outside of their venues.

Despite limited resources, we will strive to continue the use of the Twitter and Commitments wall and live-streaming of HDIM, and upgrade the human dimension meetings' online application. We will also think of other forms of engagement, including for those who cannot be present in person, such as **moderated on-line questions** to meetings' participants, introduction - prior to relevant sessions and side events - of **online polls** on their topics, running parallel **competitions and courses** for wider public, **especially young people**, on those topics, and creating a facilitated place - a human rights agora or a space in a World Café format - to instigate dialogue and collaborative thinking.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have tabled some proposals that I will be very happy to discuss with you. They do not require any changes in the modalities, even though some of them would require additional financial resources. I realize that it may appear bold to request additional resources for our work given that we just came from a Ministerial Council with not a single decision in the Human Dimension made. But I do believe in the power of good ideas and that openness and liberty will in the end prevail.

I am looking forward to discussing with you.