

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2016

**Opening statement by Mr. Witold Waszczykowski
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland
(Warsaw, September 19, 2016)**

Mr. Chairman – dear Frank-Walter,

Mr. Director,

Excellencies,

And all Distinguished Guests gathered here today,

I am really honored to welcome you to the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw. The 20th edition of this major conference on human rights and democracy in Europe is even more exceptional this year, as we have been celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) here in Warsaw.

First of all, I would like to commend the German Chairmanship of the OSCE and personally my dear colleague Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier for his able leadership and enthusiasm. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to ODIHR's Director, Mr. Michael Georg Link, and his excellent team for their effective co-operation and for organizing this conference.

As I emphasized on numerous occasions, Poland is very proud to be the host country of the Office. The establishment of ODIHR in Warsaw, formerly the Office of Free Elections, by the 1990 Charter of Paris was a token of trust and appreciation to Poland, a country which initiated the democratic changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw is a highly symbolic place, a vital forum of exchange bringing together diverse stakeholders from the East and the West who can debate together the most pressing issues with regard to human rights and democracy in the spirit of solidarity and cooperation.

At this opening session, I think it is also vital to recall, once again, ODHIR's numerous achievements. In particular, I would like to commend the pivotal role the Office plays

in diverse fields, such as election observation, education, tolerance, non-discrimination, the rule of law, and many others. Twenty years of experience clearly show that the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, ODIHR's flagship event, helps create powerful synergies among governments, diverse agencies, on-the-ground practitioners, and the media.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Speaking about the OSCE itself, it is important to acknowledge that currently the Organization is equipped with the necessary "acquis" that has been agreed upon by all participating States in all three dimensions throughout the last 40 years. In politico-military dimension, for instance, the Vienna Document, the Treaty on Open Skies and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) proved their significance and relevance. All participating States should engage in joint efforts aimed at fostering the existing security arrangements. There is an urgent need to move forward, even with small steps.

We have to remember that prolonged conflicts would mean a permanent risk to the security of the whole OSCE area, including a constant threat to human rights situation. In particular, the ongoing conflict in and around Ukraine caused by the powerful neighbor, continues to pose the biggest challenge to our common security and to the OSCE itself. Our essential aim should be to develop a lasting solution, fully based on the international law and the OSCE principles and commitments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this special occasion, I would like to underline once again that the human dimension is a fundamental component of the OSCE comprehensive concept of security. Respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are typically the first victims of any conflict, is one of the key conditions of friendly international relations. We need to fully embrace a miscellany of human concerns in order to achieve lasting peace and be able to build more secure, equitable and inclusive societies in our countries, across the OSCE region and worldwide.

In this context, I am glad that this year's Meeting will discuss in greater depth diverse issues with regard to good governance. Indeed, it is indispensable to acknowledge that well-functioning, healthy democracies imply increased and meaningful public participation, especially of under-represented groups: youth, women, persons with disabilities and national minorities. Interestingly, the average percentage of young Europeans who are members of a political party is currently less than two per cent. This clearly shows that one of the major challenges in this respect is to ensure that under-represented groups are politically empowered. It is crucial to engage them as competent partners in matters that closely affect their lives, thus strengthening community social cohesion. As a politician, I would be pleased to hear about the HDIM's solutions on how to foster political pluralism and participation, as well as on how to support youth political activism in our states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges of policy makers is currently the degree to which they authorize individuals to exercise their freedom of assembly and association, considered to be the cornerstone of democracy. Given the growing risks of radicalization and terrorism, it is cumbersome at times to strike the right balance between the freedom of assembly and association and appropriate legislative measures aimed at combating terrorism and extremism. I look forward very much to hearing about the Meeting's deliberations in this respect.

Finally, I am glad that the 2016 Meeting will look at ways of combating trafficking in human beings, of preventing hate crimes, racism, xenophobia and discrimination, the fields in which a lot remains to be done.

Distinguished Guests,

I hope that the 20th Human Dimension Implementation Meeting will allow you to bring fresh perspectives and concrete proposals to a wide spectrum of human rights-related causes. I wish you fruitful debates and a mutually-enriching cooperation here in Warsaw and in all your joint endeavors beyond this gathering.

Thank you for your attention.