

Address by OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President George Tsereteli
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 10 September 2018

Minister Czaputowicz,
Ambassador Azzoni,
Director Gisladdottir,
Dear Mr. Désir,
Dear Ambassador Zannier,
Distinguished guests,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today to represent the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the opening of this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

At the onset, let me thank the Italian Chairmanship of the OSCE and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for organizing this very important annual event.

I am happy that we are gathered today despite difficulties in agreeing to an agenda in the OSCE Permanent Council.

Finding consensus is always a challenge. Even in the Parliamentary Assembly, we still have sharp disagreements.

But what our experience shows, and you all know this well, is that direct and constructive dialogue is always the best way forward.

We are here, entrusted by our citizens to solve problems and to find solutions to their complicated lives. Let us not needlessly add further obstacles. I hope this is the spirit that everybody here will share and approach their work in the coming weeks.

With that in mind and with the aim of ensuring the efficient operation of our Organization, the OSCE PA has formulated and implemented several changes to the consensus rule.

Those should perhaps be considered by participating States to strengthen the impact of the OSCE's work.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting serves a crucial purpose in the work of the OSCE.

By bringing together in the same room representatives from civil society organizations and Ambassadors from OSCE countries, it offers a unique opportunity to breathe grassroots energy into the work of the OSCE.

All of us gathered today must recognize that a pluralistic and strong civil society is indispensable to a functioning democracy and vital to promote and protect human rights.

Your participation in our work is most welcome.

Of course, some countries will see their practices criticized during this meeting.

This open dialogue on controversial issues must continue and opposing views must be allowed to be heard by all in order to successfully work together towards implementing our OSCE commitments.

Although some countries might feel singled out, the truth is that no one should be immune from well-grounded criticism.

Reviewing the implementation of our commitments is something that should be done not only every year here in Warsaw, but every single day in our home countries.

This should be at the heart of our political action.

Distinguished guests,

In many ways, this meeting is complementary of the work we undertake within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

As you well know, the human dimension is referred to as the third dimension of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. But I would say that the human dimension should always be our first priority.

When we put our OSCE hats on, our primary goal is to better the lives of the more than one billion people of the OSCE area.

Our duty is to respond to their desire to live in a free society, where democratic debate is encouraged and not stifled, where journalists are respected and not jailed or killed, where a simple citizen can trust that his or her voice counts and is not discarded.

And so today, let me reiterate the political support of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly when it comes to implementing the human dimension commitments to which our governments have pledged.

As representatives of the people, we are the critical link between the citizens and their governments. We are here to channel your concerns and work together to hold all OSCE countries accountable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OSCE PA's Berlin Declaration, adopted last July, identifies several priority areas where greater attention is required to promote human security in the OSCE area.

Let me here mention a few, which no doubt will be debated in greater detail over the coming days.

The refugee and migrant crisis continues to occupy a prominent place on the international agenda and the work of the OSCE PA. This is the case not only in the Mediterranean, but also in North America, as we have seen in recent months.

We believe it is the duty of all OSCE countries to protect the rights of migrants and refugees, especially their freedom from arbitrary detention. It is also our collective expectation that our governments refrain from forced returns of refugees and asylum seekers to countries where they could face torture or inhuman treatment.

Together, we must actively work on the integration of refugees and protect their right to family reunification, with particular consideration for unaccompanied minors.

But above all we must work together to stop the tragedies and hardship that force people to flee their homes.

This requires all of us – NGOs, politicians, and administrations – to work in concert.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to also see that there will be discussion of national minorities rights issues during this meeting. There are a number of non-implemented commitments in this field that require attention.

Working together with High Commissioner Zannier, in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, we also plan to increase our efforts and contribution in this area.

Dear friends,

In an interconnected world increasingly characterized by the spread of disinformation and propaganda, we need to redouble efforts to promote media and digital literacy to increase the resistance of our societies to “fake news.”

Allow me here to use this opportunity to also thank OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for its excellent work in countering this challenge.

As we discussed in Berlin, there is an urgent need to restore the status of free and independent journalism as a central source of credible and reliable information to counter the growing informational chaos.

Finally, as one of the few publicly elected people in this room, I would like to bring your attention to the area of elections, and to election observation in particular.

Our debates in Berlin confirmed a growing concern over the proliferation of unprofessional and biased election monitoring, often promoted by host governments and national parliaments.

This has the unfortunate consequence of undermining public trust in election observation overall.

Sitting here today alongside ODIHR Director Gisladdottir, let me underscore the high value of the OSCE's election observation activities, characterized by a political leadership underpinned by credible long-term analysis.

Our Organization possesses this strong asset recognized throughout the world. We must do all that we can to continue to protect it.

This also requires our Organization to constantly refine its practices to avoid any possible appearance of conflict of interest or corruption.

As we regularly ask from our national parliaments and our colleagues, we must also ask that OSCE participating States refrain from participating in observation activities which are neither transparent nor based on a systematic methodology.

Distinguished guests,

Over the next dozen days, many creative ideas and practices will be shared here. I encourage all participants to seize this unique opportunity for dialogue.

But, of course, discussions and debates will never be enough. Political will is necessary to put all these ideas into practice.

The PA significantly stepped up its engagement with the HDIM this year, as five or six Members of our Bureau will be in attendance.

With this in mind, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly looks forward to working with all our partners around this table today – participating States, OSCE institutions, the broader international community, and civil society – to promote accountability and advance human security for all across the OSCE area.

I wish you all a successful session.

Thank you.