



WELCOMING REMARKS

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Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on
Challenges of Election Technologies and Procedures
Vienna, 21-22 April 2005

Mr. Director,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Addressing the election-related issues within the OSCE)

Democracy is a process. And the conduct of democratic elections is one of its vital parts. Democracy can not be fulfilled at once nor merely by opening the polling stations on the Election Day. Democracy as a process can always be improved. It has to evolve so as to respond to the new challenges of our societies.

I am pleased to welcome you here in Vienna at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Challenges of Election Technologies and Procedures. In the last two years this is a second SHDM on the issue of elections. In June last year a SHDM on Electoral standards and Commitments was organized, following the Maastricht Ministerial Council decision on elections. By that decision the Permanent Council was given a task, drawing on the expertise from the ODIHR, to consider the need for additional commitments on elections, supplementing the existing ones. However, by the end of the last year the discussion has not been concluded and at the Sofia Ministerial Council, less than half a year ago, no agreement among participating States was reached regarding the issue of elections.

(Democratic elections as common values of all OSCE Participating States)

This has led the Slovenian Chairmanship to set election issues as one of the priorities of our Chairmanship. **The OSCE commitments on democratic elections are at the core of the OSCE values.** The basic ground for our discussion remains, of course, the Copenhagen document, which contains the commitments that all OSCE participating States have freely entered into.

Elections are the central institute of any democracy. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration various issues raised by participating States in this regard. Recently, the debate on election-related issues has heated up. Taking into account the ongoing discussions within the OSCE, this meeting focuses on three main issues: 1) the challenges of new election technologies; 2) the challenges of implementation of existing commitments as well as addressing the need for additional commitments, and on 3) challenges of election observation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Historical context and the need for Copenhagen Plus)

This April we have just celebrated 15 years since the first democratic elections were held in Slovenia back in 1990. This was the major step on our way to democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, economic and social development, building security, as well as independence. It was the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the beginning of the new era after the Cold War. **Without any doubt, the OSCE played a key role in encouraging all these positive developments within Central and Eastern Europe.**

It was during those historical moments that the Copenhagen document was developed and adopted. There was a strong awareness of all the benefits, which clear commitments on democratic elections can bring. In this context, the OSCE participating States committed themselves also to invite the OSCE observers to monitor the compliance with the OSCE commitments during the conduct of elections. **Yet now, after 15 years, there appears to be a growing need to develop some additional commitments to the existing ones.** The ODIHR experience has shown that the election process in a number of participating States can be further improved. It is, in my opinion, also important to address the issues which were not reflected in Copenhagen set of rules. These further challenges were elaborated in a discussion paper for the last year SHDM and relate, for instance, to referendums and “recall” elections, electronic voting and counting technologies and the development of election standards by other international organizations. The important role of domestic non-partisan election observer groups should also be further addressed.

While these areas are complex and do not present a complete list of new challenges in the election field, in our opinion, **the principal issues for discussing additional commitments are (1) to further universal and equal suffrage, (2) to increase transparency in election related processes, (3) to enhance accountability of electoral authorities and contenders, and (4) to maintain public confidence in the electoral process.** The Slovenian Chairmanship is looking forward to further discussion in this regard.

(The responsibility of States for implementation of existing OSCE commitments)

It is repeated over and over again that the **primary responsibility to implement OSCE human dimension commitments lies within the participating States.** It is the fact that all modern democracies hold elections, but not all elections meet international democratic standards and commitments. It should be our common goal to ensure they do, in order to strengthen security and cooperation throughout the OSCE.

Democratic elections are not merely symbolic. They are competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive elections in which the chief decision-makers in a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize government, to publish their criticism and to present alternatives. 1990 Copenhagen document emphasizes fundamental principles that are central to a democratic tradition and can be summed up in seven key words: **universal, equal, fair, secret, free, transparent, and accountable. Democratic elections respect fundamental human rights.** In this regard, aiming to the implementation of OSCE commitments for democratic elections should remain our priority – and the OSCE must do its part.

Ladies and gentlemen,

(The role of the OSCE/ODIHR in election assistance and observation)

Dr. Dimitrij Rupel, Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE stated recently for one of the international magazines: **“The OSCE can do its part by offering both election preparation assistance, election monitoring assistance, as well as, assistance to the ... government.** But we have to be clear. **The role of the OSCE cannot be to pick a new government; we can only help by facilitating the process and offering our expert assistance.** The positive impact of democracy, free and fair elections cannot be denied neither in America nor in Russia (not to speak about Europe and Asia). In fact, election monitoring throughout Europe and Central Asia has helped to strengthen democracies.”

I would like to support and further encourage **the OSCE/ODIHR efforts to diversify the composition of election observation missions, both through its regular channels for recruitment and through the special voluntary Fund for Diversification of Election Observation Missions.** We should also encourage the knowledge of languages widely used in the region where a particular observation takes place.

The ODIHR plays an irreplaceable role in conducting election observation. Its methodology on long-term, supported by short-term election observation has impacted the methodologies of other international organizations in monitoring elections. **In this respect the OSCE/ODIHR election observation activities are of great importance for all of us. I believe it is safe to claim that the OSCE/ODIHR is the leading regional institution in conducting election observation,** in close cooperation with other international organizations and in particular with parliamentarians from our respective Parliamentary Assemblies.

This meeting also offers **the opportunity for exchanging of information among various international organizations and institutions on their experiences and methodologies of election observation.** I am also pleased that the new revised **Fifth Edition of “The ODIHR Election Observation Handbook”** has been issued just before this meeting and will be presented during the meeting.

To conclude,

(Concluding remarks)

I hope that the discussions today and tomorrow on election-related issues will result in a number of **concrete and constructive recommendations on how to tackle the new challenges of election technologies and procedures.**

I am looking forward towards a fruitful and open discussion and I wish you successful work and a pleasant stay in Vienna.

Thank you.