



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 2, 2023

Director Mecacci, dear Matteo, welcome back to the Permanent Council. Congratulations to you and to your excellent and hard-working team, and of course to the North Macedonia Chairpersonship, for putting together another impactful Warsaw Human Dimension Conference. With some 1,500 registered participants – including an estimated 700 civil society participants from across North America, Europe and Central Asia – this year’s WHDC demonstrated that the demand has not diminished for holding a comprehensive OSCE conference on the human dimension to evaluate how well participating States are implementing our commitments. Indeed, the long lines to register to speak at the plenary sessions and several standing-room-only side events testified to the continued importance of the dialogue between civil society organizations and participating States.

This is a dialogue we cannot and should not take for granted. For the second year in a row, Russia tried to suppress conversations about its external aggression and internal repression by obstructing the officially mandated Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Yet, thanks to the leadership of the Chair in Office, the organizational capabilities of ODIHR, and the presence of all but a handful of participating States, the WHDC once again fulfilled its important role to hold participating States accountable. Participants recounted the horrors Russia has inflicted, not just on the people of Ukraine but on its own citizens as well. Day after day, we heard testimonies from civil society organizations from Ukraine about the atrocities and abuses Russia’s forces have committed, and about these organizations’ heroic efforts to aid the victims and document the crimes.

Russia’s ally and enabler in Belarus, the Lukashenka regime, did not escape scrutiny as well. Dozens of Belarusian human rights activists, journalists, and members of the democratic opposition spoke about the regime’s complete and utter disregard for human rights and democratic principles. But, like their counterparts from Ukraine, they did not simply dwell on the horrors that they have endured; rather, they offered us important insights and recommendations on ways to hold the Kremlin and the Lukashenka regime to account for their abuses with the goal of building a peaceful and democratic future for the entire region. The recently formed Group of Friends of Democratic Belarus shows participating States’ determination to ensure there is no impunity.

While violations of human rights by Russia and Belarus were rightly a major focus of the Warsaw discussions, the wide range of serious concerns identified by government delegations and NGO representatives at the conference makes clear that there is much serious work to do elsewhere in the region as well. ODIHR remains vital to achieving the OSCE’s

comprehensive vision of security. Lasting peace and prosperity depend on participating States' respect for the dignity and human rights of all their inhabitants. When a government – any government – does not adhere to democratic principles of government, when it ignores the rule of law, when it blatantly denies the exercise of fundamental freedoms for those living within its borders, when it targets civil society, independent media, and peaceful opposition members and their families for politically motivated reprisal, it's very likely to present a security risk to its neighbors and to the region.

ODIHR's expertise and assistance to participating States is more important now than it ever has been. The institution's practical programs on democracy, the rule of law, human rights, gender equity and equality, preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, and promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, help to establish better laws and practices bringing real benefits to both governments and civil society. ODIHR's election observation missions provide important recommendations to improve election administration for all participating States, thus strengthening democratic practices throughout the region - practices that we all have committed to.

Director Mecacci, you and the ODIHR team have our full support, and will continue to do so. We will continue to advocate for a robust budget for you that advances our collective OSCE human dimension commitments, a responsibility that all OSCE participating States have undertaken. Your institution's work is indispensable to meeting OSCE human dimension objectives, and we will sustain our strong advocacy in support of ODIHR's mandate.

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