

# Improving OSCE Human Dimension Events

## A never-ending story

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In November 2012, the OSCE will be able to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Human Dimension Seminar. A year later it will be 20 years ago that the first Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) was convened in Warsaw. Ever since, the discussion on the Human Dimension events has continued up to the present day. Despite several attempts, it has still not been possible to find a formula that is both acceptable to all participants, governmental or non-governmental alike. Ambassador Greminger informs us in the present issue on the work undertaken under his chairmanship and he deserves our full support.

Since that first seminar and the first HDIM, I was a regular participant at these events until my retirement more than ten years later. As these events were a new phenomenon in the CSCE/OSCE, there were many discussions on their format, duration and the like, in an attempt to try to find the best formula for them. Several issues of the Helsinki Monitor, the predecessor of Security and Human Rights, contain contributions written by myself, either alone or together with others. Events did indeed change from time to time. In particular in the period during which Ambassador Stoudmann was heading the ODIHR. However, it is interesting to note that the criticisms and deficiencies which Ambassador Greminger mentions are more or less the same as those I heard when I was still actively engaged in the OSCE. The underlying problems have obviously remained more or less the same since I retired in December 2004.

Why do we have a HDIM anyway? Here a brief historical explanation is necessary. The original CSCE Follow Up meetings had an implementation phase, preceding the discussions on new commitments. The same was the case for the Conference on the Human Dimension (CDH)<sup>1</sup> but in practice only in the first meeting of the CDH in Paris (1989) did an implementation debate take place. In the two following meetings (Copenhagen and Moscow), all the time available had to be used to work on the documents that were to emerge from them. After all, only four weeks were available.

With the Documents of Copenhagen (1990) and Moscow (1991), standard setting in the field of the Human Dimension had more or less reached the limits of what was possible at that time. New meetings of the CDH were therefore not foreseen as they would in all probability not substantially add to the commitments that had already been laid down. However, the need remained to monitor whether and in how far these commitments were fulfilled. That was to be done with a new instrument, the HDIM, which originally lasted for three weeks – mainly because the CDH lasted for four weeks.<sup>2</sup>

Another decision, however, proved to be more important and to have more consequences, namely that ‘the implementation meeting will not produce a negotiated document’.<sup>3</sup> In itself this was logical – if there was to be a negotiated document (and that in a mere three weeks) most delegates would almost immediately assemble in drafting groups all over the premises, leaving in the main hall only the representatives of NGOs and perhaps some junior members of the larger delegations.

But the fact that the HDIM did not and does not come up with a piece of paper as proof of what had been done, made – and still makes – it difficult to explain at home what the delegates have done in Warsaw. From other

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1 Concluding Document of Vienna (1989), Annex X, I. Agenda, pt. 3: ‘Exchange of views on the situation in the participating States with regard to respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, human contacts and other issues of a related humanitarian character, including the implementation of relevant CSCE commitments’.

2 Three weeks were proposed at the Helsinki Meeting in 1992 in the expectation that in the course of the discussions two weeks would finally emerge. To the surprise of many, the three weeks passed unopposed.

3 Helsinki Decisions (1992), Chapter VI: The Human Dimension, pt. 11.

meetings, they can return waving a negotiated and adopted document, or at least a resolution condemning whatever abuse happens to draw the displeasure of their governments. That such a resolution has been passed by a majority vote, after winning the support of a number of states which are completely indifferent to the issue or want (and get) something in return, does not diminish the achievement – a resolution has been passed. Besides, negotiating is much more fun than just listening to interventions.

Nothing of that at the HDIM! The only document that emerges is compiled by the rapporteurs and is intended merely to record, in a non-biased way, what has happened at the meeting. In later HDIMs, participants were expressly invited to submit recommendations, and with the limited time available this became a goal in itself. The net result was as could be expected. The meeting was swamped by a deluge of recommendations and as everyone thinks his own recommendation is the most worthy, it will probably never be possible to limit their number. In the end a document emerged that was heavy mainly in the literal sense and that nobody had time or even bothered to read. And as it has not been adopted by the meeting, it is easy to ignore it.<sup>4</sup> This explains, at least partially, the lack of any follow-up to the recommendations, one of the well-known criticisms, and more generally the declining interest in the outcome of the HDIM.

There are other reasons for such a declining interest. The past twenty-odd years have seen important changes in the political landscape of Europe. In particular, the European Union has grown to include an ever increasing number of states, and some others are now in the process of negotiating their admission. The EU countries do not generally criticise each other for deficiencies in the field of the human dimension, at least not in the open. In the OSCE and in particular in the HDIM, on the other hand, they come with interventions, which have already been coordinated up to the last comma. These interventions are cast in stone and any spontaneous reaction is almost impossible. By the same token, the number of participating States which remain for criticism is now reduced to the fringes of the OSCE area. It comes as no surprise that there is a poor attendance record when it comes to participating states at a higher level or in charge of implementing commitments. They come when decisions have to be taken, not just to listen.

They certainly do not come for two, let alone three weeks. Their agendas would not allow that in the first place. The issue of the duration of the HDIM has indeed been a persistent one – on the one hand, there are those who want to shorten it and, on the other, the complaint is heard about too little speaking time. This is obviously a contradiction. But to put it in simple terms: if a meeting is interesting, nobody will complain about its duration, whereas when it is tedious, even a week is too long. Perhaps one should consider returning to the old times of the CSCE ‘travelling circus’, holding its meetings in a different place at each occasion. As it was said at a time when meetings took place from Cracow to Ottawa and from Oslo to Palma de Mallorca: ‘Join the CSCE and see the world’. But this would incur even greater criticism that the Human Dimension events absorb too many resources and so a recommendation does not stand a chance of being adopted. It might enhance participation, though.

Perhaps this is too gloomy a picture. What has been said above about the HDIM applies less to the seminars and supplementary meetings. Their interest and the liveliness of the debates depend more on the subject chosen and also on the quality of the moderators. Participants are, it may be hoped at least, experts in their fields. Positive results can certainly be noted. Interest in Roma and Sinti, in religious freedom and in the position of

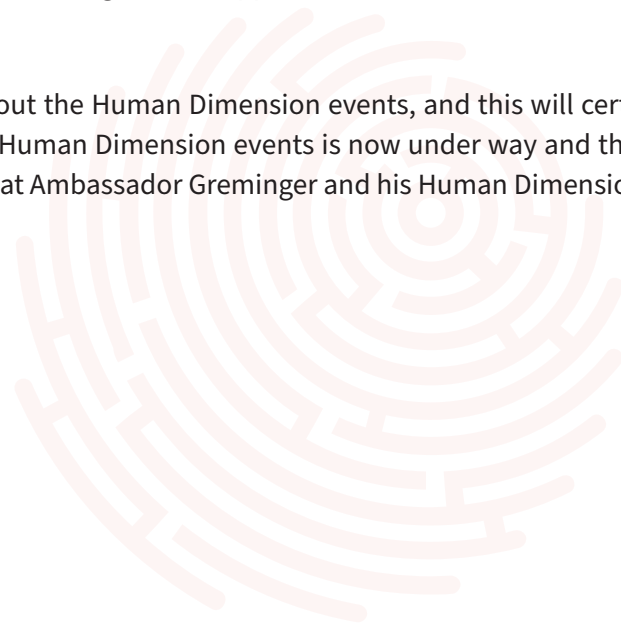
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4 According to the Helsinki Decisions (Ch. VI, pt. 10) ‘the implementation meeting may draw to the attention of the SCO (the then existing Committee of Senior Officials) measures to improve implementation which it deems necessary’. In my recollection this has never been done.

women in the OSCE, to name but a few examples, has greatly been enhanced by the seminars devoted to these subjects. They finally resulted in action plans, a panel of experts and action by the ODIHR, which were adopted or endorsed by the OSCE as a whole. It is certainly possible to make good use of the Human Dimension events, if the Chairman-in-Office and/or some participating States are willing to set themselves clear aims and to take the results to the OSCE as a whole. The attendance of NGOs in the field – the Roma and Sinti are a good example – can be very useful, even indispensable in such cases and the OSCE offers probably the best opportunity for them to make themselves heard. The Human Dimension events are a tool, not an aim in themselves.

This role of NGOs in the Human Dimension events has – for me at least – always been one of the most important assets. The side-events organised by them along the margins of the meetings were at times more interesting than the official part – if only because there it is possible to have an open exchange of views without prepared statements. I fully agree with Ambassador Greminger that the fact that the OSCE Human Dimension events gather the largest number of representatives of civil society already makes a meeting somewhat special. In general, like in other similar meetings, what happens in the corridors is more important than what takes place in the formal sessions.

Much more could be said about the Human Dimension events, and this will certainly happen, as the study on the best way to improve the Human Dimension events is now under way and the discussions continue. In any case, it must be welcomed that Ambassador Greminger and his Human Dimension Committee have engaged in such a study.





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