

Reviewing the OSCE Human Dimension events

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It is true: one should not repair a car which is not broken. However, nobody can seriously pretend that there is no room for improving Human Dimension events. The will to improve the Human Dimension events is widespread, not only among OSCE participating states but also among the civil society representatives. What are the most often heard criticisms? Events are being perceived as inefficient, too long, and absorbing too many resources in comparison with the other OSCE dimensions. The absence of NGOs from Western countries, too little speaking time and NGO participation as such have also been subjects of controversy. The lack of follow-up to the recommendations of the Human Dimension events is often mentioned. Poor attendance from participating states at the high level or lack of participation of those persons that are in charge of implementing commitments is also deplored.

Since I took over my function as Chair of the Human Dimension Committee,¹ we decided in cooperation with the Lithuanian Chairmanship, to design an ambitious but balanced work programme taking up interests and issues of concerns of all OSCE participating states. We consulted with all of them and did not refrain from tackling topics that were considered as difficult, politicized and/or taboo. Since the beginning, we were confident that by creating a positive working environment and enhancing trust, it would become possible to have a constructive dialogue on all issues. After hearing so many voices asking for reviewing OSCE Human Dimension events, we did not hesitate to put it on the agenda.

In the past few years, many suggestions for improving the Human Dimension events have been made, not only by participating states, but also by representatives of the civil society. However, the diverging positions on this issue seemed too entrenched to allow for any constructive discussion. This year, we have, together with the Lithuanian chairmanship, clearly seen an increased interest of participating states to review and improve the organization and modalities of the Human Dimension meetings.

In order to launch discussions on this 'difficult' topic in the most objective way in the Human Dimension Committee, we decided to commission a study. The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs has engaged Ximpulse, a Swiss think tank with expertise on organisational development and experience in international relations, governance and human rights, to identify and recommend options on how to render the Human Dimension events more attractive, effective and focused. The study is supposed to provide food for thought, analysis, pragmatic tools and guidance from an external perspective, which would lead us through the reform process and provide a basis for constructive discussions.

The think tank proposed to work in two distinct stages. The first one consisted in a desk review and numerous interviews in Vienna and Warsaw with participating states representatives, OSCE Parliamentary assembly, OSCE institutions as well as civil society representatives in order to establish an outline of the study. This outline included a first assessment of the status quo, listing the various expectations for the future, and an outline of Ximpulse's approach to the in-depth study for the second phase. The first discussion on this paper took place in the Human Dimension Committee meeting of 11 October 2011. The second phase of the study will be conducted in the coming months and will lead to a final report which will be available by the end of the first quarter of 2012.


¹ The Human Dimension Committee was established at the end of 2006 as informal subsidiary bodies to the Permanent Council. The mandate of the Human dimension committee includes: Discuss human dimension issues, including implementation of the commitments, Support the preparation of the HDIM and other human dimension meetings, Consider cross-dimensional issues with a particular connection to the human dimension, when so requested by the Chairmanship in consultation with participating States, Discuss recommendations to the Permanent Council on the programme of work, including actions to follow up on recommendations made at the human dimension meetings. The chairperson of the committee is appointed by the current OSCE Chair.

The first phase paper 'The OSCE Human Dimension events: The way forward' focuses on the Human Dimension events (particularly Human Dimension Implementation meetings, Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings and Human Dimension Seminars). Even if the focus of the study was on the Human Dimension events, Ximpulse underlined that the overall OSCE context could not be ignored because it influenced perception of the human dimension and Human Dimension events.

In order to provide a framework for the discussion on the reform of Human Dimension events, Ximpulse, in its paper, recommended conducting the reflections on three levels looking at 1) the goals and objectives of Human Dimension events in general, 2) the role and sequencing of the various types of HD events, and 3) the design of individual events.

The study aims at supporting the discussions in a structured way and allow for an enlightening debate, but it will be up to the participating states to assess the different options and to agree on a set of reform measures that allows satisfying the different expectations of different stakeholders groups. A package deal will be unavoidable if we want to progress. The political risks of this process are limited since any changes to the existing modalities would need consensus.² As the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is said to gather the largest number of representatives of the civil society of any comparable event, it is important that the expectations that OSCE Human Dimension events raise are fulfilled. Holding these events should not be a standard exercise but a meaningful step evolving in accordance with the current situation of the implementation of human dimension commitments in the OSCE area. I am aware that it will be not be an easy task and am committed to leading through this process in a transparent and inclusive manner. I highly value the dialogue initiated with representatives of the civil society on this topic during the HDIM in Warsaw. The inputs provided to the study and the clear needs expressed will be considered. I look forward to continuing the exchange of views not only on this particular topic but more generally during my time as Chair of the Human Dimension Committee.

² PC Decision No. 476 of 2002 set the Modalities for OSCE Meetings on Human Dimension Issues.



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