
It is an honour to speak as one of the panellists from the perspective of the OSCE ODIHR as an OSCE institution for this Session entitled “Taking stock of developments in cooperation between the United Nations and regional human rights mechanisms”.

As the main institution of the OSCE for the human dimension, ODIHR is mandated to assist participating States in the implementation of their human dimension commitments by providing expertise and practical support in ensuring full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and building up democratic institutions. In this task, our Office co-operates with a large number of international and regional organizations based on the principles of partnership, equal participation and consultation with a view to providing the best added value to our beneficiaries, the OSCE participating States. While ODIHR’s work focuses on the third security dimension of the OSCE, the so-called “human dimension” and on civil and political rights, other OSCE structures such as the OSCE Office for Economic and Environmental Affairs (OCEEA) and OSCE Field Operations work on the second dimension, and the field of social, economic and cultural rights. Nevertheless, ODIHR activities and tools can also inform the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights and indeed often are cross-cutting in areas such as migration, gender equality, combating trafficking in human beings, human rights education and the protection of other fundamental human rights.

The OSCE’s co-operation with international and regional organizations takes many forms, including the exchange of data and information, often resulting in the development of common publications and databases, the sharing of reports and assessments, as well as the issuing of joint press statements or press releases. Secondly, collaboration also encompasses common programmatic action, including the organization of joint events and training activities, common strategies and action plans, the joint development and implementation of projects, as well as resource mobilization. Finally, it also entails the establishment of institutional links, including regular working meetings at all levels, reciprocal representation at events, the setting up of liaison officers or focal points, and the addressing of mutual decision-making bodies by respective senior officials.

In this connection, I would like to highlight the recent Human Dimension Seminar on Improving OSCE effectiveness by enhancing its co-operation with relevant regional and international organizations, held in Warsaw from 12 to 14 May 2014, which was the first organised for OSCE participating States and provided an opportunity for representatives of the OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, representatives of regional and international organizations and civil society actors to review the unique role of international co-operation in assisting OSCE participating States in meeting their human
dimension commitments. Taking the OSCE’s body of commitments as a starting point for discussion, the Seminar examined the formal and informal co-operation arrangements established over time between the OSCE and a wide range of regional and international organizations, with the aim of identifying practical steps and recommendations to improve this co-operation.

Building on the UN 2012 Workshop and the discussions and recommendations at the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar, I would like to highlight some examples of good practices and lessons learned in relation to our cooperation which were identified, and where our co-operation with UN agencies has been effective and continues to identify human dimension implementation gaps and serves to enable ODIHR to assist OSCE participating States in addressing these. These good practices could also serve as an example on how economic, social and cultural rights can be promoted as a result of cooperation between the OSCE and UN agencies.

A very good illustration of successful co-operation between ODIHR and UN agencies has been our response to the Ukrainian crisis which due to the positive collaboration and complementarity of the OSCE and OHCHR on the ground, enabled both organisations to assess the Human Rights situation in Ukraine, which served to inform the OSCE ODIHR Human Rights Assessment Mission (HRAM) Report and its recommendations which was issued in May 2014. ODIHR and OHCHR continue to exchange regular information and will work together to ensure the appropriate follow-up to the recommendations made in the HRAM report.

Furthermore, the OSCE as a whole and ODIHR in particular provides input to OHCHR on the human rights situation in the context of elections, migration and freedom of movement, gender equality and women’s political participation, tolerance & non-discrimination as well as democratic governance, the rule of law and the protection of minority rights and makes contributions to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of OSCE participating States.

ODIHR also co-operates with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe to assess the situation of human rights defenders and has recently launched the OSCE recommendations on the protection of human rights defenders. ODIHR also has regular contacts with UN special rapporteur representatives, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly and Association as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights, with whom we hold consultative meetings and exchange expertise.

In the field of gender equality, ODIHR works closely with international and regional organizations as well as non-governmental organizations to promote women’s political participation and gender equality and to enhance the capacities of National Human Rights
Institutions in the OSCE region. In this regard, ODIHR has developed a number of tools including the Handbook for National Human Rights Institutions and Gender Equality and the Handbook to Promote Women’s Participation in Political Parties and also conducts capacity building activities such as roundtable-training seminars on voluntary measures to promote women’s advancement within political parties as decision-makers and candidates for public office. These tools can also inform the cooperation between the OSCE as a whole and the UN in relation to the protection of the family and rights association with the social protection of women.

Despite a number of good practices of ODIHR’s engagement with UN agencies, effective co-operation has also posed challenges, in particular due to resource limitations both financial and human, which in light of the many requests for assistance, require a strengthening of co-operation and increased pooling of mutual resources. In addition, the abundance of financial resources often made available in short time frames focused on a specific issue or a particular crisis, pose challenges to the efficient and effective management of resources and affect the sustainability of other on-going programmes. Other challenges to our co-operation include a lack of joint strategic planning, a multiplication of human rights providers, and a lack of political will to further advance the implementation of human dimension commitments.

In light of the challenges outlined above, let me briefly outline some practical ways which in our view could serve to replicate existing good practices and steps we have recently taken to enhance our co-operation with UN partners.

In line with some of the recommendations made in the 2012 Workshop and the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar our efforts as international and regional organisations could be directed towards developing more goal- and project- oriented co-operation, integrating operational level co-operation in a wider strategic co-operation agreement among partner organizations, and/or systematically referencing mutual standards and jurisprudence. For example, avenues could be explored as to how to ensure that OSCE reports and recommendations are systematically referred to by policy makers internationally and nationally.

Furthermore, it could be explored how the UN could fully utilize and refer to OSCE publications, in particular ODIHR tools which have been developed to assist legal practitioners, civil society and OSCE governments in the interpretation and implementation of OSCE commitments often in cooperation with other international organisations such as the CoE Venice Commission. Examples of such tools are the 2010 Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and the 2011 Guidelines on Political Parties Regulation. Building on these Guidelines, ODIHR has established strong partnerships with regional and international organizations working on political party regulation, with a focus on party and campaign
financing. ODIHR and the CoE Venice Commission are also currently in the process of preparing joint *Guidelines on Freedom of Association*. These Guidelines are recognised as useful tools among international and regional organisations to provide a minimum baseline in their respective areas and present an overview of good practices across the OSCE region for OSCE participating States. They can also serve to inform the protection of economic, social and cultural rights where they are cross-cutting such as the right of everyone to form trade unions.

Greater engagement and co-ordination with national actors, including civil society, should also be considered in our co-operation. In this connection, the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) remains one of Europe’s largest annual human rights and democracy meetings, where OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation, civil society, international organizations including UN agencies and OSCE structures meet on an equal footing, to take stock of the implementation of the human dimension commitments and make recommendations for further improvements. This ability to identify and mobilize civil society representatives and experts from the whole OSCE region is undoubtedly one of the distinctive features of the OSCE and its institutions, which provides a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to exchange information and operationalise their co-operation.

We should also enhance our cooperation in providing mutual access to databases and information networks, in particular to enable us to assess the improvement of the situation of national minorities in particular in relation to the provision of adequate housing, providing access to education and social protection. We need to improve our co-operation on the development and implementation of joint projects, and ensure that information exchanges on a working as well as a strategic level are results orientated, systematically held and documented.

From an ODIHR perspective in an effort to operationalise the recommendations made in the 2012 Workshop and the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar, we welcome the signing of the Joint Declaration between ODIHR and OHCHR in June 2014 focused on increased exchange of information and expertise, joint advocacy and cross-referencing of mutual tools as well as the conduct of joint projects as a further step to enhance our cooperation. The Joint Declaration serves to formalise the regular cooperation mechanisms that already exist between our organisations and we will strive to ensure that it is implemented.

Thank you for your attention.