

Update on Ireland's Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE
Dáil, 10 May 2012

Ceann Comhairle,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the Dáil today in my capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Ireland assumed the Chairmanship of this important multilateral organisation, for the first time, on 1 January. As Chairperson, I bear overall responsibility for the executive action of the OSCE. My responsibilities include supervision of activities in relation to conflict prevention, post-conflict rehabilitation and providing leadership when crises arise within the OSCE's geographical area.

Ceann Comhairle,

With 56 participating States and a population of over one billion, the OSCE is the world's largest inter-governmental regional security organisation. It is an immense honour and responsibility to chair this Organisation.

Ireland is reaping several benefits from this role, including a significantly raised international profile. It is enhancing the reputation Ireland has for diplomacy, crisis management and expanding our conflict resolution and human rights expertise; both key features of our foreign policy.

I would like to acknowledge, from the outset, the important contribution made by the Irish members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, headed by Deputy Eoghan Murphy. The Parliamentary Assembly plays a vital role in facilitating inter-parliamentary dialogue. Its key role in election monitoring is widely recognised, and I know that many members – past and present - of the Oireachtas have served on OSCE election monitoring missions. I have met with the President and Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly on a number of occasions in the past 12 months or so, and I look forward to continued cooperation throughout the year.

Ceann Comhairle,

I wish to provide an update to the House on Chairmanship developments across the three policy areas of the OSCE, namely: the politico-military dimension; the economic

and environmental dimension; and the human dimension which covers human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Ireland has traditionally attached particular importance to the **Human Dimension** of the OSCE and, in keeping with the central focus of Irish foreign policy on human rights and democratic values, has proposed an ambitious agenda in this area for our Chairmanship-in-Office.

The OSCE's comprehensive security concept, dating back to the 1975 Helsinki Act, considers the human dimension of security – the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic institutions and the rule of law – to be as important for the maintenance of peace and stability as the politico-military or economic dimensions.

In order to advance implementation of OSCE Human Dimension commitments, , a package of eight events was agreed on 21 March. The package includes meetings in Vienna and Warsaw on the following topics: Combating Racism, Intolerance and Discrimination in Society through Sport; Democratic elections and election observation; Freedom of Assembly and Association; a Rule of Law framework for combating Trafficking in Human Beings; Freedom of Religion or Belief; Empowerment of Roma Women; and Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities. Ireland also plans to organise a small number of side-events during the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in October-November, addressing topics which traditionally receive scant attention in the OSCE but which we consider crucial, such as the protection of human rights defenders.

An additional event, the Dublin Conference on Internet Freedom, is to be held in Dublin Castle on 18-19 June, and will be one of the highlights of the Chairmanship. It is hoped to gather over 200 OSCE delegates, members of civil society and representatives of the ICT and media sectors to discuss how best to ensure compliance with OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Today, the Internet and other connective technologies have given citizens in the OSCE region and throughout the world a new platform for the exercise of their right to freedom of opinion and expression. Regrettably, some governments are limiting these freedoms, contrary to their OSCE commitments and other international human rights obligations. Practices such as illicit monitoring, filtering and blocking of websites, as well as intimidation and arrest of bloggers and internet activists are unacceptable, just as it is unacceptable to illegally monitor telephone conversations or

arrest newspaper editors for expressing their opinions. By exploring international obligations, examining best practices, and discussing other related issues such as Internet access and governance, it is hoped to move towards a greater common understanding on how to strengthen Internet Freedom. In doing so, we will also seek to showcase Ireland as the Internet Capital of Europe, taking advantage of the presence here of so many industry leaders in internet and new media technologies, such as Google, Facebook and Twitter.

Ceann Comhairle,

A key role for the OSCE, within the Human Dimension, is to help to ensure that election processes run smoothly and are held under free and fair conditions. I am pleased to report that the OSCE agreed, at very short notice, to assist with ballot facilitation to allow eligible voters in Kosovo to vote in the 6 May Serbian parliamentary and presidential elections. I personally was involved in helping to broker the agreement, and am very pleased to report that restraint was shown by all parties, which allowed for the peaceful conduct of the OSCE-run balloting facilitation in Kosovo on 6 May. Full co-operation was offered by the local institutions and the international community, in particular KFOR and EULEX. I share the view of the Secretary General of the OSCE, who has welcomed the achievement of the Mission in Kosovo, as well as the assistance offered by other OSCE field missions in the region, and said that the outcome has shown the OSCE at its very best. The same facilitation arrangement will apply to the second round of the presidential election on 20 May.

Ceann Comhairle,

As the world's largest regional security organisation, the OSCE continues to play an important role in ensuring peace, stability and security in our region. The confidence and security building measures adopted within the **Politico-Military Dimension** remain central to the enhancement of security within the OSCE area. Our priority, as Chairmanship, is to see continued progress on updating these measures and on enhancing the conflict prevention capacity of the organisation.

The collective goal of the Organisation, as agreed at the 2010 Astana Summit, is to work towards a genuine Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community, rooted in agreed principles, shared commitments and common goals. With a view to working towards this security community, we have called on participating States to reflect on the building blocks available to us in the areas of arms control, conflict prevention and

resolution and trans-national threats. This will be the theme for the Annual Security Review Conference to be held in Vienna in June.

One of our Chairmanship priorities in this Dimension is the establishment of an informal working group on cyber security, and I am pleased to report that we succeeded in reaching agreement on this last week. Our aim is to increase the role and contribution of the OSCE in the field of cyber security, and the working group will be mandated to elaborate a set of Confidence Building Measures on risk reduction, transparency and attribution, with a view to reducing the risk of misidentification of a cyber incident. Ensuring a safe and secure cyber environment is of the utmost importance, as cyber threats have the potential to endanger our national security, public safety and economic competitiveness.

Ceann Comhairle,

I hosted a high-level conference in Dublin on 27 April, entitled ‘Shared Future: Building and Sustaining Peace, the Northern Ireland case study.’

This event brought together over two hundred delegates from across the area covered by the OSCE. It provided them with a unique opportunity to listen to the experiences of a range of senior political figures with first-hand experience of the peace process.

I was joined by, amongst others, First Minister Peter Robinson; Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness; and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Owen Paterson. We also heard from former US Senator George Mitchell, whose chairing of the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement was central to the achievement of political settlement on this island and, in addition, we had a video message from Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton. All five of the main parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly were represented at the conference. The former President of Finland and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Martti Ahtisaari, acted as moderator, bringing his unique experience of conflict resolution and mediation to bear on what were frank and open discussions.

This was the first time that the Government has organised an event of this kind. What I hope we have achieved, by drawing on our own recent experience of conflict, is to offer support and encouragement to those striving for peace beyond these shores. Feedback has already been extremely positive and I am pleased that it is being recognised as a unique and worthwhile contribution by Ireland in our role as Chair-in-Office.

Ceann Comhairle,

Within the **Economic and Environmental Dimension**, Ireland's core theme is the promotion of security and stability through good governance. Ireland's ratification last year of the UN Convention against Corruption signals our determination to further international cooperation in this area.

During the two preparatory conferences, held to date as part of the Economic and Environmental Forum process, we have focussed in particular on measures to counter corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing. In this regard, we have highlighted the work of the Criminal Assets Bureau as a model for other participating States to consider.

We have also explored the linkages between transparency and socio-economic development. Good governance and transparency are central to developing stable and sustainable economies, whereas ineffective governance clearly undermines economic development.

Ceann Comhairle,

As Chairperson, I am working with others to promote lasting settlements to a number of conflicts in the OSCE area.

Drawing on usual practice, I have appointed two Special Representatives to assist me in this regard. Ambassador Pádraig Murphy is the Special Representative for the South Caucasus. Ambassador Erwan Fouéré is Special Representative for the Transdniestrian settlement process.

I am pleased to report that we have been able to make some progress in the so-called 5+2 talks on the Transdniestrian settlement process. Agreement has been reached on the principles and procedures for the negotiating process and on the agenda of substantive issues which will need to be addressed in the negotiations. The first '5+2' talks under our Chairmanship took place at Farmleigh House from 28-29 February. Those discussions were constructive, with the participants agreeing to establish a regular rhythm of meetings throughout the year.

On the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus, namely those dealt with in the Geneva Discussions, set up after the August 2008 war in Georgia, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, we always knew that progress was going to be difficult to achieve.

On the Geneva Discussions, the fact that the participants are meeting regularly is positive. In addition to the meetings in Geneva, regular meetings on the ground, co-facilitated on my behalf by Ambassador Murphy, have played an important role in preventing and responding to incidents, and improving the safety and security of local residents. On the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I regret to say that there has been a flare up of incidents recently on the line of contact as well as on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. It is unfortunate that it has not yet proved possible to find agreement on confidence building measures suggested by the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, the OSCE body which deals with this conflict. During the year, I hope to visit the region myself and talk to some of those involved with these conflicts.

Ceann Comhairle,

The key event of the year is the OSCE Ministerial which will take place in Dublin in early December. It will be the largest gathering ever of Foreign Ministers in Ireland.

The Ministerial represents the main opportunity to agree Decisions at political level in the various policy priority areas. It is too early to say at this stage what output we might expect. We intend to focus our energies on securing agreement on a small number of decisions on key topics which have been prioritised during the year.

Conclusion

I can assure the House that I am working hard to progress the principles and aims of the OSCE. It is an honour, for me personally, and for Ireland, to have such a multilateral commitment for the year.

Given the achievements to date, I am confident that, through effective cooperation, 2012 will be a positive year for the OSCE.