

**OSCE Ministerial Council Ljubljana, 6 December 2005**  
**Closing statement by Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel**  
**De Gucht, incoming Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE**

Belgium will take over the chair of the OSCE in January. On the eve of taking upon us this awesome responsibility my first wish is to thank the outgoing chair for the truly remarkable work accomplished during the past year.

The Slovenian chair had to meet many challenges. It took over the chairmanship at a time when a sense of doom was clouding the OSCE and its future. The organization was lacking a proper budget, which threatened to impair its functioning. Fortunately, this vexing question is now behind us. We must thank the chairman-in-office and his team for having spared no effort to bring about this satisfactory outcome.

In 2005 the OSCE also went through difficult and challenging times in Ukraine, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Although prospects remain uncertain, especially in areas where so-called frozen conflicts have not yet found a solution, the future seems more promising now, at least in some instances where, with renewed efforts and good-will on the part of all concerned, a solution could come closer.

After a challenging year I think that there is now a greater recognition of what OSCE and its unique cross-dimensional mandate can do for peace and stability in Europe.

The OSCE looks in better shape at the end of 2005 than it was at the beginning of the year. I sincerely hope we will be able to draw the same conclusion when we meet in Brussels in a year from now.

Europe is now broadly at peace and building up new cooperative structures. We are celebrating this year the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. The changes which took place since the creation of the OSCE have been dramatic and, on the whole, positive. The risk of a continental conflict has disappeared. This being said, security and stability in the whole of Europe should remain a key concern for the OSCE. There will be no effective and lasting democratic rule without stability. Conversely, stability, peace and security are also predicated upon respect for democracy, civil liberties and human rights. There will also be no lasting stability without economic development.

The OSCE is therefore instrumental in turning Europe, as a whole, into an area of peace, stability, freedom and economic development. Still skepticism too often prevails when it comes to the effectiveness of the OSCE.

The question is sometimes asked: is the OSCE a community of values or a community of commitments? The question seems to me of a rather semantic nature. Values are relevant in the measure that they are implemented.

What is, in all cases, true is that the OSCE is a community of dialogue, especially when there are disagreements about implementing the commitments. The main role of the OSCE is not to sanction but to mutually assist every member in implementing its obligations under the Helsinki Act and the Paris Charter. This is the main function of the OSCE and its institutions such as ODHIR, the High Commissioner for National Minorities and the Representative for Freedom of the Media office, as well as the field missions. Each of them therefore needs our collective support.

Looking at next year, the first task of a chair is to pursue with the ongoing agenda, to take up where the previous chair left off, to listen to member states, to be an “honest broker”. In other words, the chair is to be the servant of the organization. Secondly, the OSCE is not the only organization on the European scene. The Belgian chair wants to put a special effort in fostering cooperation between the OSCE and the European Union, NATO, the Council of Europe and others.

I will have the privilege of presenting to the Belgian OSCE program to the Permanent Council on January 12. I will limit myself here to a brief overview.

The Belgian program for 2006 is to a large extent set on the basis of conclusions of Ljubljana. The program is in fact twofold: pragmatic and thematic on the one hand, political on the other.

Pragmatically we will have to manage and steer the OSCE through the meanders of the many meetings, conferences and seminars that make the daily activity of the organization, with a view to achieving

results. This is not always an easy task, the OSCE being rather heavy machinery.

Thematically, Belgium will pursue two priorities. First, to advance the rule of law, with a special focus on criminal justice and facilitating access to law. In the fight against organized crime our purpose will be to tackle the issue in a more comprehensive, coherent and cross-dimensional way than was the case so far.

This particular focus will be without prejudice to other ongoing activities underway in these fields. It's more a question of streamlining than of opening up new fields of action.

Another priority will be to more evenly balance the activities undertaken in the three different dimensions, in particular by giving more substance to the economic and environmental dimension. It is with this in mind that we decided to bring the question of transport upfront on the agenda. I'm happy to say we already received overall support from the participating states.

The seminar on military doctrine will be, I hope, a good way to re-energize the political-military dimension.

We have agreed at our meeting in Ljubljana on a roadmap to strengthen the effectiveness of the OSCE. It will be the task of the Belgian Chairmanship to carry forward the task of reforming our institution according to the mandate. We hope to be in a position to propose a set of measures for decision in December next year. But it will be for all of us to invest in this endeavor, by making the necessary efforts and demonstrating the necessary flexibility.

The political agenda – that is, building a safer and more stable Europe, where the rule of law is fully respected – will depend to a very large extent on political circumstances and the regional environment as well as the willingness of the parties themselves to progress toward agreements on the frozen conflicts and their disposition to make the necessary compromises. These are many factors beyond the direct control of the chair. This said, our role as chair will be to assist where we can, to be stand-by and ready to act and support when and where opportunities appear. In this respect field missions will continue to play an important role both from the

point of monitoring the situation and of helping the chair and the OSCE in general in their task of preventing conflicts and assisting in their resolutions.

We are very much aware that Kosovo will be a major issue for the OSCE in 2006. There is great appreciation for the work that the OSCE has done and is still doing in Kosovo. There is the expectation that the OSCE, through its presence and experience, will continue to play an important role. Belgium will put its OSCE Chairmanship to full use in order to ensure that the OSCE can deliver what the international community will expect it to do.

A chair can only achieve what member states can agree to. True, it is for the chair to instill vision, a sense of purpose and the necessary dynamism but it is for all of us, collectively and individually, to do what is needed for the common good of Europe. Decisions in the OSCE require consensus. But consensus is not an end in itself nor should it be seen as a veto right. It is a means to achieve, democratically, a common objective. It is the sovereign right of each participating state to take part in a decision. But this right imposes on each of us a

measure of responsibility toward all of us collectively and toward future generations.

The rule of consensus carries within itself the need for tolerance, understanding, international responsibility and therefore the need for responsible compromises when necessary for the sake and the integrity of the OSCE itself.

It is in this spirit that I would like to conclude, knowing that your support will be key to the success of our chair.

I look forward to welcoming you in Brussels on 4 and 5 December 2006.

Thank you.