

CiO Statement to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Vienna, Austria

24 February 2011

Thank you, Mr. President.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is good to be back with old colleagues and friends from the Parliamentary Assembly. I am particularly pleased to see among you Vilija Abramikiene who has succeeded me as the head of my own Lithuanian delegation.

As Chairman in Office, I view many of the issues which concern all of us from a special perspective. I want to assure you, however, that I never stop viewing them also from a parliamentarian's perspective.

Most of the issues which I have been engaged in since assuming the OSCE Chair involve Human Rights, freedom of the media, elections and ethnic and border conflicts. There are always different perspectives. Each has its supporters and opponents.

There is one perspective, however, which we all share. That is the perspective of the Helsinki process; the perspective guided by the values and principles which each of our participating States have affirmed and reaffirmed over the years, including those in the Declaration adopted by our Heads of State and Governments at the Astana last December.

Let me share with you what I have been working on over the past two months. Then let me hear from you. What is pressing from your perspective? Your thoughts are valuable to me and to the OSCE.

The OSCE participating States have made progress over the years, individually and collectively, toward the goals of the Helsinki process. But even today, as the Chairman-in-Office, I still see individuals facing challenges in securing their basic human rights, guaranteeing fair elections, protecting freedom of speech and the safety of journalists and ensuring that anti-terrorism measures comply with international human rights standards.

Consequently, I have set goals that would further the key principles of the Helsinki Decalogue. They support implementation of the commitments undertaken in Istanbul, Paris, and most recently re-confirmed in Astana. Our aim is to work towards realizing the vision of a security community throughout our shared OSCE area.

Mr. President

In this endeavor I have already visited Vienna, Brussels, Moscow, Kiev, Moldova (Chisinau and Tiraspol), New York and Washington DC. The Chairmanship has, since the 1st of January, engaged in an intensive dialogue on issues across all three dimensions. OSCE Secretary General de Brichambaut, ODIHR Director Lenarcic, and OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media Mijatovic and High Commissioner on National Minorities Vollebeck continue to coordinate closely with me on the issues before us.

Neither I nor my representatives have been shy about raising difficult cases including human rights, the safety of journalists or questions of election fairness.

Belarus:

We are all familiar with the events associated with the Presidential elections in Belarus. The ODIHR report on the December 2010 presidential elections is out. It is objective. Despite some reported improvements in the election law, for example, and an overall improved campaign environment, the report concludes that Belarus "failed to meet key OSCE commitments for democratic elections," and "has a considerable way to go in meeting (these) commitments."

The report also highlights that the post-election demonstrations by the opposition leaders were suppressed by force, its leaders jailed along with journalists, human rights activists and civil society representatives. I am seriously concerned about the start of trials of demonstrators and presidential candidates. The presence of objective ODIHR trial monitors is essential.

We remain troubled by the overall situation, including the closure of the Office in Minsk. The need for an OSCE presence is still essential. To explore this and other possibilities I sent my Deputy Minister to Minsk for discussions. As Chairman-in-Office I will continue to look for an engagement formula, to build bridges, to facilitate in implementing the OSCE principles and commitments.

Your help in this regard would be welcome. I see an important role for members of the Parliamentary Assembly and its Belarus working group to join me in engaging our neighbour in a constructive dialogue, so Belarus will again benefit from the full opportunities offered by the OSCE.

Albania:

Recent protests in Albania, and the regrettable loss of life gave us all cause for concern.

As the Chairmanship we saw the potential for an explosion and acted immediately, sending my Special Envoy to Tirana. In close co-ordination the Chair, with our Field Presence, the EU, the US and other partners, sought to help the government and opposition get out of dangerous political gridlock. We are prepared to offer support and mediate in the situation if requested and appropriate.

As parliamentarians, I can imagine you providing guidance, support and counsel to your fellow parliamentarians in Tirana.

Let me say few words on Protracted Conflicts

Progress on the conflict in Georgia will not be an easy matter. My special representative for protracted conflicts, together with the UN and EU Co-chairs of the Geneva discussions, visited key capitals and talked to key parties in preparation for the next round of the Geneva talks in March. In my own consultations I have explained that I plan to use the Geneva process to rebuild trust and continue the work of the previous Chairmanships to restore a meaningful OSCE presence in Georgia.

Meanwhile, I believe the time has come to press for progress in resolving the Transdniestria conflict. The resumption of the official 5+2 settlement negotiation format has become a major priority over the past weeks. My interlocutors, High Representative Ashton, Foreign Ministers Lavrov of Russia, Gryshchenko of Ukraine and Leanca of Moldova, have all sent signals of a need – and willingness -- to move ahead.

I met with the governments involved in the 5+2 talks and with the political leadership on both sides of the river Nistru. We discussed ways forward in the settlement process, fully respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. I remain cautiously optimistic that the resumption of official negotiations in the 5+2 format with a full agenda is achievable this year.

I have also met with the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group. I am concerned about the potential for deterioration in the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Casualties have been occurring at an increasing rate along the Contact Line. The OSCE role in pursuing a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through stronger engagement by the Co-chairs of the Minsk Group will be maintained. We invite the conflict parties, and other OSCE participating States, to consider options for confidence-building measures and strengthening the OSCE monitoring activities, particularly in light of growing tensions on the ground.

As Chairman I will be visiting the South Caucasus in mid-March to pursue these matters further.

Transnational Threats

Some of the greatest threats to our individual and collective security are trans-national threats. Based on my recent meetings and discussions, I sense that there is broad support among participating States, not the least in Moscow, Brussels and Washington, to address transnational threats of terrorism, cyber security and drug trafficking. They also involve intensified engagement with Afghanistan, particularly through the border management and security programmes. We will continue to make use of the OSCE field operations in Central Asia as well as the OSCE institutions in Dushanbe and Bishkek. As parliamentarians I would hope you would help pave the way for this kind of regional cooperation through your natural and regular contacts.

Partners for Cooperation,

We have all been witnesses to the ongoing dramatic events in some of our partnership countries, including Egypt and Tunisia. The question on everyone's mind is, what happens next?

Along with my fellow European foreign ministers I have expressed my solidarity with the people of Egypt and Tunisia and recognized their democratic aspirations. I share the concerns of many because of the massive violence against the civilian population in Libya.

The participating States of the OSCE cannot and should not seek to guide the course of events in any of our partner countries. Their citizens must write their own destinies. But, as I stated before the UN Security Council, I am prepared to facilitate exchanges on how the OSCE's experience in promoting security, enhancing prosperity and building strong democratic institutions and vibrant civil societies might prove relevant to transition processes in our partner countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President,

At Astana the Heads of State and Governments expressed determination "to intensify co-operation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and encourage its efforts to promote security, democracy and prosperity throughout the OSCE area and within participating States, and to increase confidence among participating States".

Lithuania's Chairmanship seeks to see that this stated intention becomes an ever greater reality.

I have been candid and outspoken by soliciting your support in dealing with conflicts. I encourage you, as parliamentarians, with the special quality you bring as elected officials, to continue to work for genuine human rights implementation, for the protection of journalists and the freedom of the media, and foremost for free and fair election procedures.

In June I will sponsor a conference on Media Freedom in Vilnius. I hope that many will attend. And, dear Petros, I want that you honor us by addressing the conference.

Mr. President,

The work of the Chairmanship is not the work of one person. It involves us all. We are a complex team of Field Presences, the Secretariat, the Institutions, the Permanent Council, and you, the Parliamentary Assembly. Each brings its own gifts and talents and has its own mandate. Collectively we are a strong force for bringing democracy, human rights and security, cooperation and prosperity to our shared Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region.

There are several specific goals I hope we will, working together, achieve by the end of the year.

With your support we should register tangible progress in addressing protracted conflicts:

We should improve our record of implementation of media freedom commitments. Also in the Human Dimension we can all contribute to the promotion of tolerance education to combat hate crimes and discrimination throughout the OSCE area.

I believe we will make significant progress in responding to transnational threats, including those emanating from Afghanistan.

Last, but not least, we look forward to a defined OSCE role in our energy security dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Besides the challenges and opportunities which I have just outlined, our Organization faces another important task this year.

The Chairmanship has begun the selection process for a new Secretary General. Participating States have offered four excellent candidates. The selection process will be transparent and open, involving -- to the extent possible -- input from all concerned. As CiO, I have asked Ambassador Norkus, the Chairperson of the Permanent Council, to begin the process in Vienna. He has convened a group of experienced ambassadors -- Friends of the Chair -- reflecting a balance of gender and geography, which will help the Chairmanship in this process. In the course of the next three months, we will be soliciting views from delegations, weighing the choices of all 56 carefully, so that hopefully we will be able to facilitate consensus on a decision by early summer.

I also want to take this opportunity to announce my intention to propose the extension of the Head of the ODIHR, Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, to another term in that post. In this context, the valuable relations between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights should be underlined. The two institutions play a critical role in providing their individual, unique and mutually supportive expertise on the issue of election-related activities

Dear Colleagues,

As Members of the Parliamentary Assembly, individually and collectively, you bring the perspective of elected representatives of the participating States. You have a special, legitimate, democratic voice with which to engage the governments, institutions, and political parties of participating States on all important matters that our organization is dealing with.

Let me, therefore, sincerely thank you for your contributions to the work of our organization, and for your support in all of our COMMON endeavours.

Thank you Mr. President.