

Hon. Alcee L. HASTINGS, MC
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING
(Sofia, Bulgaria, 6-7 December 2004)

SALUTATIONS / INTRODUCTION:

Mr. President,
Mr. Chairman in Office of the OSCE,
Ministers,
Secretary General
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am most honoured to address for the first time the OSCE Ministerial Council on behalf of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which represents more than 300 parliamentarians from our participating States.
- The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has continued throughout this past year to fulfil the task set forth in the *Charter of Paris*, and to provide on the international level some degree of democratic legitimacy to the OSCE. The Parliamentary Assembly - as one of the most important institutions of the OSCE - has a significant, integral role to play in the actions of our Organisation.
- During this year, the Assembly, has continued to promote parliamentary involvement in the activities of the OSCE, and has facilitated inter-parliamentary dialogue and cooperation, thus providing a vital link between

the governmental side of the OSCE and representatives who are directly elected by the popular will of the citizens of our member countries.

- The Assembly increases the visibility of the OSCE among our citizens, while improving public understanding of the important tasks this Organisation carries out. At the same time, the Assembly continues to work towards the implementation by national legislatures of OSCE commitments.
- The Assembly's Annual Session in Edinburgh was devoted to "*Cooperation and Partnership: Coping with New Security Threats*", under which parliamentarians from the participating States debated and made concrete proposals on the future of the OSCE.
- May I express once again the hope that the governments of the OSCE Participating States and the OSCE itself will pay due attention to the conclusions and recommendations adopted in Edinburgh.

BULGARIAN CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE OSCE:

- The Bulgarian Chairmanship of the OSCE has been very supportive of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and we very much appreciated the presence of the Chairman in Office, Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, in our meetings and sessions this year.
- We sincerely congratulate Bulgaria for the significant work carried out in the past months in the difficult and challenging task of guiding the OSCE. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly shares the Chairmanship's views on the need for reform and adaptation of the OSCE. I hope that this Ministerial gives a much needed impetus to the Organisation's reform efforts.

REFORM OF THE OSCE:

- While we believe in the progress we have made, one can not ignore the calls from within the organization and without for reform. And not just OSCE reform, but the time has come for all multilateral organizations to do critical introspection to indeed be sure we are meeting yesterday's, today's, and tomorrow's challenges and responsibilities in our globally chaotic societies. Today is tomorrow. We don't have time to waste.
- The OSCE must continue to reform and adapt its mechanisms and procedures with a view to upholding its efficiency and credibility.
- One of the main weaknesses of the OSCE lies in its decision making procedure. The highly decentralized responsibilities and the fact that the PC in its collectivism is the chief executive officer, together with a non transparent and indiscriminate application of the consensus principle not only make it difficult to come to decisions, but also render it sometimes virtually impossible to hold anybody accountable for the organization's activities or -most of all -it's failure to act.
- With its Resolution on Co-operation the Assembly reiterates its previous recommendations that the OSCE carry out the necessary reforms with regard to its decision-making procedure, both in terms of enhancing its transparency and of looking into the possibility of differentiating the consensus principle, providing for instance for a consensus minus two or three for decisions on budget and personnel, particularly for heads of institutions and missions as well as for other high-level personnel.
- The Assembly supports the further strengthening of Police and Anti-Terrorism activities, as well as the development of the economic and environmental dimension.

- The Assembly also welcomes a further strengthening of the work of our missions in Central Asia and in the Caucasus. You all know how much value the assembly attaches to the work of the missions in general. We believe that they are the OSCE'S most valuable asset. We therefore cannot share any calls for substantial reductions in the areas of our field activities nor on human rights issues

ELECTION MONITORING

- The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has continued to develop a particularly active programme for monitoring elections.
- As you all know in 2004, we have observed the electoral processes in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Ukraine and the USA.
- The presence of parliamentary observers at elections during transitional periods emphasizes the importance of legislatures in providing a balance to executive authority. As parliamentarians are themselves directly elected public officials, local and international media often greatly value their observations.
- The Co-operation agreement between the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly has proven successful.
- The observation mission in the US elections has been a success, giving the OSCE great visibility and enhanced credibility.
- Our presence in established democracies gives proof of our determination to apply uniform standards to all Participating States, whether they are located East or West of Vienna.
- Although the Assembly was not involved, we praise the OSCE Election Support

Team in Afghanistan.

FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

Since its inception OSCE has engaged in early warning conflict prevention, crisis management and post conflict rehabilitation. Our threats were no less clear and present detriments to our countries, but they were different in nature depending on our geopolitical spheres.

Today, we are faced with new threats to our peace regardless of our place. Our enemy is common to all of us. Terrorism, Poverty and Economic faltering are pandemic and endemic in many of our states.

- No doubt a root cause of our current difficulties is great misunderstanding.
- Misunderstanding leads to distrust.
- Distrust leads to tension and
- Tension to conflict.
- But, conflicts be they hot or frozen, must be cooled or thawed with cooperation, understanding and mutual respect.
- The Assembly welcomes the adoption of the *Statement on Preventing and Combating Terrorism* at this Ministerial Council.
- We remain committed to the anti-terrorism OSCE Decisions: the Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism, the OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism and the OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the 21st Century.
- The Parliamentary Assembly has adopted numerous recommendations in the field of the fight against terror. We have consistently encouraged the

improvement of cooperation and coordination amongst organisations, states, and other actors.

- On numerous occasions, the Assembly has also encouraged the parliaments of the OSCE participating States to ratify the twelve UN Conventions related to the fight against terrorism. Some OSCE participating States have not yet done this.
- As Members of parliaments we support our governments in their joint efforts against terrorist networks. Executive measures taken to this end need our support, as we, the representatives of our citizens, provide the necessary legitimacy for the actions of the executive bodies.

Just as our enemy is common, so is our goal. Peace and Stability. The road to stability runs through all of our participating states. Not just the large ones but also the small ones. Be it Vilnius or Vancouver, Pahokee or Prague. The eradication of this dangerous phenomenon is our collective desire.

RELATIONS WITH THE OSCE PARTNERS

- The Parliamentary Assembly also continues to pay special importance to the relations between the OSCE and its Mediterranean and Asian Partners. The events and aftermath of 11 September 2001 have highlighted the importance of security in Asia, the Mediterranean, and in the OSCE area as a whole, as well as the need for increased dialogue among OSCE member governments and parliaments with our Partners. As Parliamentary Assembly President, in an effort to strengthen relations and to continue the work of my predecessor, Bruce George, I will head to Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, when I depart this Ministerial Meeting.
- In Rotterdam, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly reflected its interest in enhancing the Mediterranean dialogue in the OSCE by adopting the

Resolution on the OSCE Mediterranean Dimension, introduced by US Congressman Benjamin Cardin. The Resolution points out the need for the OSCE to enhance its role in the Mediterranean region by further promoting its Mediterranean dimension and achieving closer co-operation with the Mediterranean partners.

- Both the OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation should aim at promoting security and co-operation in the region through a comprehensive process of enhanced political dialogue, economic co-operation and intercultural exchanges, as well as through the strengthening of democratic institutions and respects for human rights. We have encouraged the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation to use the framework and mechanisms of the OSCE, as a model for enhancing security, promoting co-operation and protecting human rights in the region.
- The Assembly has established a Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum to meet every year to discuss issues referring to security in the Mediterranean region. This Forum has proven to be a useful tool in promoting parliamentary dialogue among parliamentarians from the OSCE and the Partner States.
- We share the view that the OSCE should keep the door open for new Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Cooperation. We would strongly welcome the admission of Mongolia as a Partner.

CONCLUSIONS

My colleagues and I welcome Slovenia to the Chairmanship in Office of the OSCE for 2005. We very much look forward to working with our Slovenian friends in promoting the principles that make the OSCE a unique Organisation.>

And we also welcome Belgium to the OSCE Troika.

- An American activists said, "Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither person nor property will be safe." -Frederick Douglass
- We preach peace and stability. We preach democracy building but long prepared speeches delivered in monotone voices will not achieve it alone. And a one size fit all model for democracy will not move closed societies any closer to freedom.
- The OSCE has enormous potential to help Europe and the world to become places of peace, stability and co-operation. Within our respective bodies we have the power.
- The challenges we face today require new responses and new responses require meaningful dialogue and dialogue requires, most importantly, collective understanding.
- Without understanding, OSCE is fated for failure. It is imperative that we- each of us, recognize the need for OSCE and begin to feel it in our skin, and then we will know that what we're doing is worthwhile. **Why the need for OSCE?** Because the world will be more dangerous without it. Because the survival of humankind may lie with us.

Thank you.