



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**SECRETARY GENERAL
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Speaking Points

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Rector,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to speak before the European Humanities University and the Institute of International Relations and Political Science. Both institutions embody the great European tradition of liberal education, a tradition that transcends borders and that reaches across the diversity of our cultures to unify us all around shared values and a common vision. The objective of fostering independent thinking is vital for the future of this region and for the whole of Europe. I commend your missions and wish your good luck in your efforts.

The Lithuanian Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2011 is a tribute to the success of this country and its people. Lithuania's experience and its unique contribution to international relations have much to offer to the OSCE and the other 55 participating States.

Before such an expert audience, I could address many subjects of interest – developments in Kosovo, volatility in the protracted conflicts. Perhaps, we can return to these a little later.

Instead, I wish to raise a wider question, which relates to the state of health of democracy across Greater Europe. The question matters for the societies of this region, because it goes to the heart of daily concerns and peoples' hopes for the future. The question is real, it is not theoretical.

The state of democracy's health matters intensely for the OSCE. With the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe* in 1990, assisting the democratic transitions of its participating States became a central task of the OSCE.

It is worth returning to the 1990 text. In Paris, the 34 countries of the then CSCE agreed to a document where they stated: "We undertake to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations."

An ambitious vision, drafted in unambiguous language.

On this keystone foundation, the OSCE has developed a multi-faceted approach to supporting democratic institutions, the rule of law and healthy societies. In the process, the participating States have agreed to an extensive body of commitments related to democracy and its practice.

Eighteen years after Paris, the questions that I wish to address are the following: How does the OSCE go about supporting healthy democracies and strong institutions? What challenges does Greater Europe still face in this area? What can the OSCE do to help?

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The OSCE has developed a useful and varied toolbox to help States to develop and maintain democratic institutions and the rule of law. Nineteen Field Operations work on the ground, and specialized Institutions support States and their societies – the ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Secretariat.

Translating ambitious political commitments into practice does not result from a single decision. Democratisation is a process that requires time and many small steps.

In this task, the OSCE has developed useful operating principles:

First, the importance of consensus. In Field Operations, consent has been founded on continual engagement with the host government, which means that steps taken at the local level are more deeply owned. Where possible, the OSCE seeks to work with the grain of local conditions in order to craft with elites and societies greater political space for the development and consolidation of democracy.

This is not an easy process, and it is one that takes time.

Thus, a second guiding principle for the OSCE has been that of patience. The democratic transformation of Eastern Europe in the 1990s saw all good things coming together at the same time. The speed of this success should not detract from the historical patience that may be required in other corners of wider Europe. The Helsinki Final Act and the process that followed were visionary in framing the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but also patient in their expectation for success.

Let us not forget this patience. It is a quality that should steady us in our resolve and keep us moving in the right direction -- no matter the obstacles that are met along the way.

Third, the OSCE has a comprehensive approach. Assisting democracy is an integral part of a more comprehensive approach to building security. For the OSCE, the protection of human and fundamental rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions are part of the package -- *not* the package itself -- designed to build security through work on political-military transparency as well as economic and environmental good governance.

A related point is that the OSCE approaches democracy as a quality that has to be built in terms of institutions and learnt in terms of culture. The OSCE never accepted the view that democracy was a force that could be simply 'unleashed' and left to prosper on its own. Nor has it accepted the idea that democracy can be summed up into a single event, such as elections.

At the same time, elections matter vitally. A key element of the OSCE approach has been to assist States in implementing their election-related commitments to ensure the legitimacy of their conduct and results. Legitimate elections are vital, because they produce legitimate governments, which, in turn, help to build healthy States and civil societies.

The OSCE works with the host country to support the entire process of elections -- before, during and after an election, in the capital and throughout the country. OSCE action is not about ‘certifying’ if an election is ‘free and fair.’ The objective is to support States at difficult moments of their political life and to assist them in the challenging process of implementing key commitments.

OSCE engagement is not about chastisement or approval; it is about supporting countries and their societies, highlighting areas for progress and seeking follow-through.

Supporting participating States in their electoral processes is a flagship activity of the Organization. The strength of this activity lies in a fact-based and a fact-driven method, which, although it requires time and effort, avoids the OSCE being laid open to the charge of subjective statements.

In sum, the OSCE takes a wide angle.

The Organization works to consolidate State institutions and their capacity. The focus also falls on building healthy civil society in the widest sense and combines action on many different levels -- starting with electoral processes and including media freedoms, minority communities, civil society support, capacity building at all levels, local governance assistance, ombudsman work, and support to police reform.

On these foundations, the OSCE approach to supporting democracy and promoting the rule of law has shown success and resilience -- despite often working in difficult contexts.

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This approach is all the more relevant given the state of health of democracy in the OSCE area today.

The picture is mixed.

On the one hand, in Central and Eastern Europe, the vision embodied in the Paris Charter has been a remarkable success. The enlargement of the European Union and NATO played a role in underpinning this success, but it was driven mostly by the commitment of societies and political leaders in these countries themselves. The face of this part of Europe has been transformed. Lithuania played a leading part in this.

In other parts of Greater Europe, however, progress has been more uncertain.

Major reforms have occurred in the countries of South-Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union to consolidate state institutions and build new political systems. But the conditions have been difficult, featuring devastating wars in the Western Balkans and conflicts in parts of the former Soviet Union. Events in Georgia since November 2007 and in Armenia after the presidential elections of February 2008 highlight the challenges still before the consolidation of democracy. In other countries, perceptions of 'democracy' seemed to have soured.

In examining the health of democracy today, I would identify five families of challenge.

First, some States are currently facing problems with their democratic transitions. An OSCE report of November 2006, *Common Responsibility: Commitments and Implementation*, underlined a host of difficulties facing the protection of liberal values and democratic practice. Consolidating and modernizing State institutions, fostering vibrant civil societies, establishing the rule of law and effective market economies – all of these are demanding processes.

We have witnessed how fragile gains may be recently in Georgia and Armenia. It is not inconceivable that the remaining societies in transition will experience bouts of

regression, perhaps even serious setbacks. Each society has to take its own path; there are few set rules.

Second, some States have started to revisit their OSCE commitments in field of democratic practice. This challenge has centred in particular on the legitimacy OSCE election observation practices. These tensions led the OSCE to desist from sending an election observation mission to the Russian parliamentary elections (2007) and presidential elections (2008) because of undue restrictions placed on the size, duration and freedom of movement of the planned OSCE observation team.

These challenges matter also because they arise in a context where ‘democracy’ is increasingly qualified by such adjectives as ‘managed’ and ‘sovereign.’

The conduct of election observation has also seen criticism from a different source. Indeed, the OSCE was criticised by NGOs and local politicians for the wording of its statement of preliminary findings and conclusions after the 2008 presidential elections in the South Caucasus.

Third, security and political developments across wider Europe throw a shadow over the promotion of democratic values and practices. The break-up of the former Yugoslavia is still running its course, and conflicts remain unsettled in the former Soviet Union.

As long as first order questions of statehood, boundaries and citizenship remain under question, democracy building will remain a fraught process in parts of the Western Balkans and the former Soviet Union.

Energy may also become a complication for parts of the OSCE area. For one, states in the OSCE area are not immune from the dangers of energy wealth — especially in circumstances where the strategic struggle to control the development and export of the Central Asian and Caspian resources has intensified.

Fourth, all OSCE states, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, face the challenge of integrating diversity into increasingly complex societies. Intolerance, hate crimes, and terrorism are creating fear and distrust in the multi-cultural cities and societies across the

OSCE area. Stereotyping, marginalization, and a lack of integration may rip the fibres of the inter-woven communities in the OSCE, leading to the anger and resentment that has bred hate, even violence.

Finally, we should note that wider trends regarding the protection of liberal values and democracy impact on the OSCE area.

If, in the early 1990s, democracy stood triumphant across the globe as the single most legitimate and effective form of governance, this may no longer be the case. The combination of apparently healthy capitalism with various shades of authoritarianism could become an attractive model, especially for states and regions allergic to the notion of ‘universal values.’ The UK Foreign Secretary, David Milliband, made this point in a recent speech when he said that ‘since the millennium, there has been a pause in the democratic advance.’

Linked to this, international relations have seen the return of the notion of ‘absolutes,’ symbolised powerfully by the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Culture, belief systems, and values – such intangibles matter intensely for relations between states and peoples, as well as for developments within States. We have not yet grasped the ramifications of this on the internal workings of our multi-cultural States. Nor do we understand yet how to handle ‘culture’ as an international issue.

One should add here the challenge posed by the rise of non-State actors to State governance. These actors include terrorist groups as well as criminal networks.

All told, these challenges throw a shadow over democracy and the promotion of liberal values in the OSCE area.

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Faced with such a stormy horizon, what can be done to sustain the momentum of democratic transformation across Greater Europe?

A first point to underline is that this can only be a task for all actors working in tandem - ranging from civil society groups and universities to international organisations. In this context, I wish to make a special case for the OSCE approach.

The OSCE has long experience in promoting liberal values and political change with its participating states. And, more importantly, this experience is one that is specifically adapted for difficult conditions.

In the 1980s, the CSCE acted as the principal forum for dialogue and co-operation between states firmly committed to democratic values and others that were *not*. Through constant, inclusive dialogue, the CSCE helped to lay the ground for the end of the Cold War and the establishment of democracy as the only accepted form of governance in Greater Europe.

Through the 1990s, however, the OSCE undertook a great deal of practical work to advance its principles, but the energies of the established democracies of Western Europe and North America, as well as the aspiring democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, focused elsewhere -- mainly, on the EU and NATO enlargement processes. The OSCE was no longer the central forum it had been in the 1980s, and the main thrust of its work shifted to 'crisis regions' in the Western Balkans and the former Soviet Union.

Today, as in the past, we face divisions in the OSCE community on core 'values' questions, with major States increasingly unlikely to accept commitments and standards they signed up to previously. In these circumstances, the experience of the OSCE as an inclusive forum and actor on the ground makes it vital once again for pursuing the vision set forth in the Paris Charter of 1990.

Comprising North America, Europe and Eurasia in the same framework of ambitious commitments, the OSCE can help to bridge differences and take Greater Europe forward together.

Indeed, the Organization is today *the* forum for engaging with all key States on issues of democracy and security, and for grappling with the complexity of a Greater Europe that stretches beyond EU and NATO borders.

The Chairmanship is vital to this process. As a political forum, OSCE vitality derives from the political will engaged in its workings by each and every participating State. It is for this reason that the Lithuanian Chairmanship is so important. The impetus and energy of Lithuania will help protect the integrity of the Organization and drive it forward, working consistently and with perseverance.

Perseverance is the twin sister of patience, and it is just as important for underpinning the shared values that lie at the heart of the OSCE.

A common *acquis* of standards that are adopted and constantly refined lie at the core of the OSCE. This is a uniquely ambitious body of commitments founded on the principle that security starts with the 'inherent dignity of the human person'. For the OSCE, security requires political-military co-operation between States, the development of healthy economic and environmental governance, and the protection of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This 'cross-dimensional' approach to security is the OSCE signature strength, and it is there to act as a compass guiding the behavior of participating States in all instances.

However, implementation of such a wide-ranging body of commitments is not a one-off decision. It is a path of persistent engagement, characterized by many small steps and progressive changes in attitudes, cultures and institutions. Democracy is not an end in itself, but a path. It is a process of tireless engagement and effort, across all of the OSCE area.

OSCE commitments remain relevant today, because they are the result of the interaction of principles and values with the changing face of reality. The confrontation of values and realities entails a process of constant debate around the nature of OSCE commitments and shared values.

Fostering tolerance in complex multicultural societies, managing new medias and forms of expression, protecting human rights in the struggle against international terrorism –

these require, indeed, constant debate and the willingness of States to re-commit to the values of the OSCE.

New issues arise, old commitments take on new contours, and new engagements must be taken. The OSCE is vital to sustaining the health of democracy across Greater Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For all of its strength, we should recognise also that the OSCE approach carries implications.

A first implication is to admit that building democracy is a long term process. Mistakes and diversions are parts of the path. The OSCE has shown itself equally useful as a framework for rapid democratic transformation in the 1990s as it is for more painstaking transitions in the first decade of the 21st century.

A second implication is linked to the principles of inclusion and consensus at the heart of the OSCE. For the sake of balancing these principles, the OSCE has gone to great effort to keep its participating States on board with the implementation of their ambitious commitments. The objective has been to keep momentum going in the right direction -- even if momentum is slow, sometimes suspended. Getting this right is not easy.

It is worth the effort, because, in 56 states across three continents, the OSCE works for stability, prosperity and democracy through political dialogue and through practical work that makes a lasting difference.

The participating States can take pride in their past achievements, and in the fact that the OSCE is unique among international organizations in its scope and inclusiveness. Where else do such a wide variety of actors share and do so much together?

However, we should be clear that common security through co-operation requires consistency of purpose and sustained political efforts. Should circumstances in greater

Europe become more difficult, with old issues re-appearing and difficult new challenges to the Helsinki agenda testing the unity of the OSCE community, such input will prove particularly in need.

This is why we look forward to working with Lithuania before and during the Chairmanship in 2011. The vision that drives this country and the experience that it brings are vital for the OSCE and for working towards the shared vision at the heart of the Organization.