

Translation

**Speech by
Gernot Erler, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office,
at the OSCE Ministerial Council
Brussels, 4 December 2006**

Mr Chairman-in-Office,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you here in Brussels to talk about the key issues which will direct the work of the OSCE in the future. First of all, I should like to thank you, Mr Chairman, for the great commitment and professional skill with which you have prepared this Ministerial Council. At the same time, I wish the forthcoming Spanish chairmanship good luck. My wish for us all: good results in the imminent negotiations.

Germany has always attached great importance to the OSCE. We have not forgotten that it was the former CSCE that helped us to lay the foundations for the reunification of our country in peace and freedom. I am pleased that my country has this year again been able to make a substantial contribution in both personnel and financial terms to the organization's success. We will continue this close cooperation with the OSCE in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My country is convinced that the OSCE offers opportunities which make it unique among international organizations. It has a shared basis of values and is the only forum of this kind in Europe in which bilateral conflicts are picked out as a central theme and in which participating states can negotiate on equal terms. It combines the concept of cooperative security and arms control with respect for democracy, human rights and good governance.

The OSCE can continue to play an important mediatory role in the so-called "frozen conflicts" in the southern Caucasus and Moldova. We encourage the relevant parties to make use of the available possibilities for negotiation and to implement agreements that have already been reached. In this connection we emphatically welcome the start made on the

withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. Now the aim here and in Moldova must be to fulfil quickly and successfully the obligations entered into at Istanbul.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A dynamic organization needs change and renewal. In order to use the opportunities inherent in this format, we must therefore adapt the OSCE to the requirements of our age. A debate on reform was successfully initiated in Ljubljana last year.

I would like to emphasize, however, that the aim of any reform must be to strengthen the OSCE, not to weaken it. It is therefore very important to my country that there is no move to encroach upon the OSCE's basic values, values which we all share and which make up the organization's strength.

These include above all the independence of its institutions, field missions and election observation missions. As an example, I should like to mention the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in Warsaw. My thanks go to its Director, Christian Strohal, for his excellent report on the implementation of the human dimension commitments. With this report the ODIHR has fulfilled its mandate from Ljubljana in exemplary fashion and given us valuable suggestions.

Germany attaches very great importance to the work of the ODIHR as a tried-and-tested instrument for the preservation of human rights standards and for the promotion of democratic development. This applies in particular to the election observation missions. Their ability to function is an indispensable prerequisite for their success; but their work must also be open and transparent for the receiving states. All participating states are invited to second objective persons as observers to such missions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Field Offices are the strength and spine of the OSCE. It is therefore very important to us that they can function on the basis of their individual mandates. We wish the receiving states would regard these missions not as foreign interference, but rather as partners – as an offer of support at a difficult time and in a challenging process of transition.

Let me mention by way of example the cross-dimensional OSCE programme to support the police force in Kyrgyzstan. The success of this programme is obvious. It has helped to ensure

that in the recent events in Kyrgyzstan the security forces worked constructively for deescalation and thus played a crucial part in defusing the situation.

In precisely this spirit of support through partnership my country has undertaken to pay particular attention to the Central Asian region during its forthcoming EU Presidency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We take very seriously criticism from those states which fear that the OSCE's activities are directed unilaterally against them and are out of all proportion with the three dimensions. Let me assure you: Germany too faces up to the mechanisms of the OSCE and the sometimes uncomfortable criticism of the community and tries to use it proactively to bring about improvements. As recently as this spring, the report by the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office, Ambassador Orhun, criticizing the naturalization laws of German Länder for Muslim minorities, sparked off a fruitful domestic-policy debate in our country. Moreover, my country emphatically supports the OSCE Declarations against anti-Semitism, racism and all forms of discrimination.

Esteemed Colleagues,

You are aware that Kazakhstan has applied for the chairmanship of the OSCE. Germany supports the idea of passing the chairmanship to a country which the OSCE has accompanied from the start of its transition. We believe that this would enable us to send a signal in favour of the participation of the young states of Central Asia and for equal rights within the OSCE. Only under these conditions will all states be able to identify with the OSCE.

However, we also see that Kazakhstan has not yet completed its process of reform and that it would like to follow its own rhythm in implementing reforms. My Kazakh colleague made it clear recently in Vienna that his Government is fully aware of its responsibility and is determined to implement its reform agenda. We will take this self-imposed obligation seriously and follow closely the progress made.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we want a strong OSCE in the future too, an OSCE which can make a substantial contribution to security, stability and the rule of law, then we should actively seize the chance afforded by this Ministerial Council so as not to waste the impetus of the moment. We should therefore conclude the reform chapter, remain open to further changes, but above all concentrate on the OSCE's core tasks: crisis management and conflict prevention,

disarmament and arms control, and the strengthening of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

I am confident that we will be able to make progress in the upcoming negotiations. Our common interest must be to adhere to the principle of consensus in forthcoming decisions. Only in this way can we maintain the OSCE as a flexible, dynamic organization – and only in this way can it continue to fulfil its role as a forum of partnership for the mutual benefit of all participants.

Thank you.