

What are the main challenges facing the OSCE in the coming period that you are most concerned to address during the Slovenian leadership of the forum?

The most immediate challenge is to secure agreement on a 2005 budget and scales of contribution for participating States. We need to reform the OSCE to make it more responsive to the needs of all 55 participating States.

Beyond that, we need to overcome the current polarisation within the Organization and prevent new dividing lines from opening up. Criticism from the Russian Federation and other CIS countries about the work of the OSCE needs to be taken seriously. We need to devote more attention and resources to the political-military and economic/environmental aspects of security, without in any way diluting the human dimension commitments which underpin everything we do.

Terrorism remains a high priority for all of us. I expect the OSCE to build on its solid practical achievements in areas such as improving our defences against the threat to civilian aircraft from shoulder-carried missiles and making it more difficult for terrorists to cross borders using forged passports. This year we will deal with the issue of container security, for example. World trade depends on container traffic and we must ensure that terrorists do not try to use containers to launch attacks. The OSCE is good at bringing together experts in these fields to work on very practical measures to make us all more secure. This is not about diplomats agreeing grand declarations at conferences, it's very concrete.

Slovenia is keen to press ahead with developing an OSCE border security concept, which is very important for preventing criminals and terrorists from crossing international frontiers with impunity.

There are numerous regional issues requiring our attention. To name just a few - the OSCE takes a keen interest in the future of Kosovo, which hosts by far the largest OSCE Mission, and we will maintain our efforts to secure solutions to the Moldova/Transdniestria problem and Nagorno-Karabakh.

I would like to see the OSCE devote more attention to policing. Demand from participating States for assistance in modernising their police forces outstrips our ability to supply it. This is really the quintessential OSCE issue – making police forces more effective in fighting crime and terrorism while also ensuring they respect human rights and are accountable to the communities they serve.

As the CSCE/OSCE approaches its 30th anniversary what do you think are the main achievements of the forum and how should these be developed in the future?

Perhaps the most important overall contribution of the OSCE/CSCE in the past 30 years has been in helping to bring about an end to the Cold War and a smooth transition into a new era of democracy and open borders. We should not forget that the first few decades of the CSCE were marked by an atmosphere of deep hostility and mistrust, with two armed blocs confronting each other. The risk of war was uppermost in people's minds.

The Helsinki process launched a process of cooperative security which remains valid and relevant today. It gave the original 35 participating States an opportunity to talk which they used successfully, even through the many dark days when agreements seemed impossible. Thanks to the CSCE, human rights - a long-standing taboo in East-West relations - became a legitimate subject of dialogue and were no longer the exclusive internal concern of any participating State.

In the military security field, the CSCE helped to reduce tensions significantly by implementing confidence-building measures which enhanced military transparency. At a time of fundamental mistrust between East and West, CSCE countries opened up many military activities to inspection by their partners. Those exchanges of military information are still taking place today but we now tend to take them for granted.

There are many specific examples of achievement of which the OSCE can be proud – too many to mention here. But let me single out just a few from the past 10 years: The OSCE has helped to end civil war in Tajikistan, constrained conflict in Ukraine, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Georgia and played a major role in building stable democratic societies in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

In Albania in 1997/98, the OSCE Presence played a key role in stabilising the country after the complete breakdown of law and order that followed the collapse of fraudulent pyramid investment schemes.

Long-term OSCE field missions play a unique role in defusing conflicts before they erupt.

They help to put in place the building-blocks of stable democratic societies through a broad range of activities that include training police officers, stemming the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons, border monitoring, combating human trafficking, monitoring elections and reforming constitutions and legislative structures.

What particular aspects of the OSCE's work in the Balkans/South-eastern Europe need to be developed in the coming period?

The OSCE should take advantage of its regional network of field missions and promote solutions to issues with regional significance. It should also concentrate on its strengths and

target its activities and resources where they can have the highest impact. I am thinking in particular of issues such as refugee return, protection of national minorities, capacity-building – particularly the judiciary and police – as well as elections.

Kosovo will be a major issue in 2005. The OSCE is a major player in Kosovo, which is home to our largest mission by far. We spend around 20% of our total budget there. The OSCE supports the lead role of the United Nations in determining the future status of Kosovo. The 2005 review of the standards may influence the consideration of future status of Kosovo and therefore means a big investment for the OSCE.

It is clear to me that the OSCE should be actively involved in the standards review process and any re-structuring of the international presence in Kosovo. This is a message that I stressed during my visit to Priština last week.

How do you think the crisis of human trafficking can be better tackled - is the OSCE able to do enough?

Human trafficking is one of the most globalised criminal businesses in the world. It is a very complex human rights problem and there is no easy answer to it.

The OSCE has developed an Action Plan which covers all the main aspects of prevention of trafficking, protection of its victims and prosecution of the criminals. The OSCE is well placed to fight this crime because within its region all States are affected by human trafficking either as countries of origin, transit or destination.

In order to enhance implementation of the commitments adopted by the 55 participating States, the OSCE last year appointed a Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, who is assisted by a special unit. The Special Representative acts as a catalyst for counter-measures to be taken by the governments of the 55 participating states in cooperation with NGOs against this modern form of slavery.

We need to continue to work hard to drastically curb trafficking, to make it impossible for traffickers to exploit children, women, and men.

For example, an expert level meeting held in Vienna at the end of February to address practical implementation issues with respect to the assistance and protection of victims trafficking. Participants were invited from all 55 States. There was special attention paid to the protection of children, which is of course one of the most tragic aspects of the problem and one that we hope to put the spotlight on in the second half of March with a high-level meeting. This will focus exclusively on trafficking in children and we hope that as many OSCE Ministers as possible will attend and present accounts of the situation in their countries, as well as exchanging details of relevant activities.