

In search of the OSCE

The making of “On the Frontlines of Peace”

“On the Frontlines of Peace: OSCE in Action” is a newly produced half-hour documentary aimed at raising public awareness of the work of the Organization. In his own inimitable style, former CNN senior correspondent Richard Blystone, the film’s scriptwriter and narrator, takes us on an exclusive tour behind the scenes and shares some personal insights into the world of the OSCE’s “diplomats in blue jeans”.

BY RICHARD BLYSTONE

To tell the story of an organization for European security, what was our Linx Productions crew doing on a pleasant residential street in Ankara?

We wanted to start with someone who had seen it all, been part of it all, and Süleyman Demirel was that someone.

In his eight decades, this courtly Turkish statesman had seen “hot” war and “cold”, and had at home weathered coups and comebacks, seven terms as prime minister and one as president. Mostly, though, we had come to see him because he was one of the few surviving signatories to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

“We thought it was an excellent thing,” he said, “but none of us foresaw — none of us *could* have foreseen — what happened 14 years later.”

His voice went quiet. “... that the Soviet empire would collapse without a major war.”

I knew what he meant. For those of us who grew up with the Cold War division of the world, it seemed back in those days as eternal as the constellations in the skies, not something that would crumble within the length of a football season.

Helsinki was the product of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe — the CSCE. It built confidence and reduced tension between the two sides of the Iron Curtain. But crucially, quietly, its human rights provisions emboldened East European dissidents, and ultimately they rose up.

“But after 1989, there was still a need to establish

peace,” Mr. Demirel said. “Helsinki was no longer the instrument. We needed something more.”

And so, a decade ago, the Turkish leader again had his pen out: signing into existence the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

To go looking for *that*, you have to range farther afield than Ankara. With 55 participating States, nowadays it could *almost* be said that the sun never sets on the OSCE.

For a portrait of today’s OSCE, Linx teams gathered in material from a polluted river in Kyrgyzstan, from what had been a battleground in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, from the Caucasus mountains between Georgia and Russia, and from voting booths in Florida.

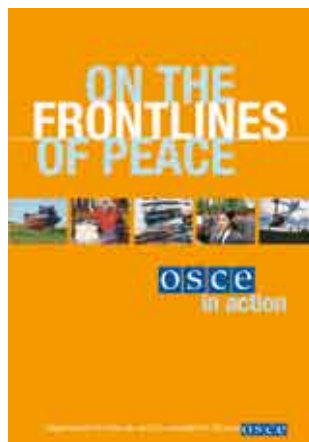
And in case you think life goes in one end of the camera and a documentary comes out the other, here are some scenes you won’t see:

Waiting. Most memorably at the end of a 12-hour drive from Croatia to Macedonia via Belgrade. (That’s how the crow might fly if he was being paid by the mile, but strange as it seems, it’s the fastest route.) Welcome to four hours awaiting clearance to enter Macedonia, a trip enriched by hours of Balkan pop radio and Croatian cameraman Vjeran Hrpka’s knowledgeable commentary thereon. I was encouraged to learn that while all the ethnic factions in the region may be at each other’s throats, all agree that Croatian pop music’s the best.

That shiver you feel at Mailuu Suu in Kyrgyzstan when you see nothing wrong, but the radiation counter



Helsinki Days: Süleyman Demirel discusses Turkish-U.S. relations with Gerald Ford.



For more information on the English and Russian versions, send an e-mail to: info@osce.org



The OSCE documentary features returnee Nebojsa Eremic and his wife, Slavica, who live in a run-down home behind a dilapidated barn while refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina occupy Nebojsa's pre-war home in Vojnic, central Croatia.

suddenly screams, "DANGER!" And the sadness at hearing the stories of people who have no choice but to live with the toxic former uranium mines here.

The weather gremlin. We'd planned a three-day shoot in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek. Suddenly nature cut that in half with a giant rainstorm. What

do you do? To stay around for more shots means waiting three days for the next plane out. So you make good with what you've got — and it's not bad at all.

The march of time. While we were editing our material, facts on the ground changed. We were working on OSCE election monitoring in Georgia when Ukraine's disputed elections sprang up and demanded to be let in. For this and other election material, we got help from Reuters TV, who were very supportive of the OSCE project and gave us material at no cost.

Nice people outside the frame. Like the British Airways staff who gave Linx's excess baggage a free ride out of Kyrgyzstan — after Linx producer Faridoun Hemani convinced them that helping the OSCE with this important story would be beneficial for that impoverished country.

New talent. An excellent video of the Georgia-Russia border was shot for Linx by Igor Zdorovets, a member of a young, fit and enthusiastic multi-national OSCE team that was charged with monitoring that highly sensitive mountain area until the end of 2004.

We were to learn that, important as elder statesmen like Süleyman Demirel may be, youth, fitness and enthusiasm are the norm for the field teams that are the soul and the muscle of the OSCE.

But as our Linx Productions team learned, enthusiasm alone is not enough. Whether the scene is an election in Russia or a housing project in Croatia, the host country is an OSCE *participating* State, with its own national pride and its own sensitivities.

So, to that list of qualifications add: *tact*. OSCE field staff are like diplomats in blue jeans — except that they don't hang out with diplomats.

Nikola Gaon, an OSCE staffer originally from Sarajevo, took us to Aracinovo and introduced us to one of his Macedonian contacts: Police Chief Ismet Ismaili.

I've often seen places at peace and then come back to report on them when they have been racked by war. Unfortunately, it's rare to find a place like this where furious

battles between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians have given way to a calm so deep that illegal woodcutting tops the crime list.

Chief Ismaili knows the OSCE not only from the smiling agents who drive up in their white field cars, but also from the conferences, courses and workshops held in the grand and dignified halls of Europe, and he credits the OSCE with making it possible to have peace in his town.

"We're showing the people that if we policemen can work and live together, then *they* can too," he says.

If there's a prize for the most miles put on one of those white four-by-fours, Christian Loda is certainly in the running.

The young Italian has spent three years tracing and retracing the back roads and dirt tracks of his remote part of Croatia. He knows routes even the locals don't know.

And he's met almost all of the ethnic Serb citizens of Croatia who had to flee during the fighting and now have come back to try to recover their homes and their lives.

Last year he found one old man all the authorities had missed. Milos Popovich was facing autumn and winter in a windowless house with a broken door, a leaking roof and no running water.

Chris Loda couldn't fix that, but he knew some people who could, and did. And that was worth a trip to the back of beyond to witness.

"That's what I like most about my job," says Chris. "I have direct contact with the people, and I can be their advocate with the government and the NGOs — and those authorities know that I know what I'm talking about."

The story of the OSCE is the story of the field workers, and for us at Linx Productions it was pure pleasure to tell it.



Richard Blystone amid the oil fires set by Saddam Hussein's fleeing troops in the oilfields of Kuwait after Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Now retired, he joined CNN three weeks before it went on the air 25 years ago.