

OSCE Ministerial Council ,Ljubljana, 5/6 December 2005

Statement on behalf of Ireland by Mr Noel Treacy, TD, Minister of State for European Affairs

Mr Chairman

Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European union by the distinguished representative of the United Kingdom.

I wish to thank you for the excellent arrangements for this Ministerial Council, and to compliment you and your team on the hard work you have put in as Chairman-in-Office. I salute Secretary General de Brichambaut at his first Ministerial Council in his new capacity.

Thirty years after the Helsinki Final Act, the Participating States need to rediscover the essential purposes of the OSCE. This is a privileged and uniquely broad-based forum for political dialogue. It is an instrument for promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and a vehicle for addressing unresolved conflicts.

When we speak of strengthening our Organisation's effectiveness, the key issue must be how better to equip it to serve those purposes. I commend the contribution of the Panel of Eminent Persons. We should agree here on parameters for taking this block of work forward and completing it next year.

Any consideration of change must start by assessing the OSCE's strengths. These include flexibility, the autonomy of its institutions, particularly in the election monitoring field, and the high calibre of its Field Missions. We must build on these strengths and firmly resist any attempt to diminish them.

Mr Chairman

The election monitoring work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is the public face of our organisation in many participating states. The widely recognised standards of excellence which ODIHR has attained make it the world leader in its field. Proposals have been made for the development of new standards and commitments in respect of elections and their monitoring. Ireland is firmly committed to the Copenhagen standards and will support efforts to strengthen and develop them just as firmly as we will resist efforts to dilute or weaken them. It is true that electoral processes are at different stages of development in different participating States, and also that none of our systems is so perfect as to be incapable of improvement. But this is an argument for enhancing our systems, not for reducing our standards.

For the OSCE to be truly effective, every Participating State must demonstrate sincerity in upholding the principles and fulfilling the commitments it assumes in the Organisation. We must collectively support each other in these endeavours and hold each other to account when necessary. In particular, silence in the face of human rights abuses on the scale reliably reported to have occurred in Andijan would not just fail the victims; it would seem to signal a measure of understanding, indeed impunity, for the violent repression of unrest. This would be an egregiously bad signal from an Organisation such as ours.

With respect to the so-called frozen conflicts in our region, I am glad that this year has seen agreement between Georgia and the Russian Federation on withdrawal of military bases in the course of 2008. Engagement aimed at ending the problem of Transnistria has also increased. These are positive steps. But full implementation of the Istanbul commitments from 1999 is an essential element of a solution in both cases. The Russian Federation and the other Parties concerned must work constructively for its early achievement.

In relation to the long- running conflict in Nagorna-Karabach, there are grounds for cautious optimism that progress towards a solution can be made in 2006. I hope that the high level meetings which took place earlier this year can now be resumed. A Ministerial Declaration from Ljubljana which included these elements would go some considerable way towards revitalising the OSCE as a forum for political dialogue.

I congratulate the Chairman- in- Office for the attention and high priority he has given to the activities of our Organisation in the Western Balkans. We can be proud of the contribution the OSCE has made in all the Western Balkan states, helping them prepare for their ultimate destiny as full participants in European integration. The future status of Kosovo will be an important item on the international agenda in 2006. The OSCE is a well-established and well-respected actor in Kosovo and will continue to have an important role to play in the implementation of whatever agreement may be reached on the status of Kosovo.

I welcome the agreement on scales of assessment for 2005-2007, which moves us closer to the principle of capacity to pay. This has been a difficult issue to resolve and I commend the work of both our Slovenian hosts and their Bulgarian predecessors.

I congratulate the three personal representatives on intolerance-related issues, not least my compatriot Ms Anastasia Crickley, for their work, and we would support the continuation of their respective mandates for one more year. I expect that their work will allow ODIHR to implement a comprehensive and holistic approach to issues of intolerance and discrimination.

Another area of OSCE work to which Ireland is particularly committed is the struggle against trafficking in human beings. This abhorrent form of contemporary slavery affects all Participating States. I am pleased that Ireland's Permanent Representative to the OSCE, Ambassador Brendan Moran, has successfully chaired the Informal Working Group on Gender and Anti-Trafficking in 2005. This Ministerial Council has before it a number of Draft Decisions on issues such as the special needs of child victims of trafficking, women in conflict prevention and the problem of violence against women, which I hope will be enthusiastically endorsed.

I welcome the adoption by the Council of Europe at its Warsaw Summit of the Declaration on Cooperation between the Council and this Organisation, based on their respective tasks and comparative advantages. Both organisations have areas of special expertise and we must ensure that they complement each other and avoid duplication. The recent signature of the agreement between the two organisations on local government assistance in south-east Europe should prove a model for future cooperation of this type.

In conclusion, I again thank you, Mr Chairman for your efforts in the past year and Ireland looks forward to working closely with Foreign Minister de Gucht in the coming year.