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Bruce George, M.P.

President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Address to the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting

Oporto, 6 December 2002

Mr. Prime Minister,

Mr. Chairman in Office of the OSCE,

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both a pleasure and an honour for me to be able address for the first time this distinguished Ministerial Council on behalf of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

On behalf of the Assembly I would like to thank Foreign Minister Martins da Cruz and his immediate predecessor Jaime Gama and their teams for their contribution to the OSCE during the Portuguese Chairmanship.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was set up in 1991, and we have laboured diligently and I believe effectively to implement the mandate given by the Governments of the OSCE participating States through the *Charter of Paris*, to provide continuous democratic legitimacy to the OSCE. The Assembly has a significant and an integral role to play in the actions of our Organisation.

We strive to be relevant to what the OSCE is doing. Our Berlin Annual Session last July addressed major issues of concern to the OSCE. The ways and means of fighting terrorism - what has been called “super terrorism” - were at the core of our debates. The OSCE must continue to play an important role in the fight against this terrorism that creates destruction and misery. The adoption of the OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism will be one of the main results of this Ministerial Council Meeting.

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished Ministers,

The world has entered a politically and militarily dangerous period in its already troubled and violent history. Other institutions are adapting to the changing circumstances and we, in the OSCE, are engaged in that same process. It appears to me it is a question of adapting or progressively fading away. This adaptation process requires imagination, resolve, and recognition of the difficulties of securing consensus. It requires difficult decisions to be made, though **We must not confuse activity with achievement.**

Few would have imagined that our Organisation would have evolved the way it has, it has been metamorphosed. We have many achievements we can loudly proclaim even though there are those who may have not noticed. We have much more to do.

We in the Parliamentary Assembly are prepared as always to be supportive. In recent years our level of activity has dramatically increased in support of the OSCE. What you are doing, we are here to assist. We look to you for your support in helping us to do more. We are on the same side and we can do more operating together than being a little mistrustful towards each other.

One of the prime goals I have set myself as President of this Assembly is for me to be able to say when my period of office expires that the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly are working better together. For as one wise civil servant in the UK said to me about the Committee I Chair in the Commons: “the better you are, the better we have to be”.

Today, more than ever, the OSCE needs to continue working for the implementation of the commitments of the OSCE participating States to ensure democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We must never forget that we are an important and indispensable organisation in this regard.

NATO and the European Union are in the process of enlarging. The outcome of the Prague Summit last month and the previewed conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council next week will have

have far-reaching consequences not only for the shape of Europe, but also for the nature of the transatlantic partnership. The enlargement of both organisations will extend even further the already large common space of democratic stability on the European continent. The OSCE, as the only pan-European security Organisation, has a crucial and unique role to play in enhancing overall security within and among states. You are today and tomorrow charting the path the OSCE must take. We are trying to aid that process of readjusting.

Neither a changing security environment nor the expansion of some of the existing organisations must necessarily lead to the redundancy of the other. Each of the existing organisations has its unique features in the security architecture of the Northern Hemisphere. The OSCE process is not outdated just because the EU and NATO will enlarge. There is still plenty of work to be done.

The Bureau of our Assembly has decided at its meeting held yesterday to devote the 2003 Rotterdam Annual Session precisely to this theme: what will be the future of the OSCE?. The OSCE and other transatlantic and European institutions, must develop its commitment to realizing the vision of an Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian community of values, without artificial and hostile dividing lines, where all members feel secure.

To be effective and significant in this new European security architecture, as the Chairman in Office stated in the Assembly's Annual Session in Berlin, The OSCE must continue to reform and adapt its mechanisms and procedures with a view to upholding its efficiency and

credibility. We in the PA very much welcome the adoption of the Porto Statement : ”*Responding to Changes*”.

The OSCE’s internal working process demands patience. The requirement for consensus, paradoxically is both a strength and a weakness. The search of a lowest common denominator can reinforce at times the sense of an OSCE community and improve prospects for implementation. However, I am more than conscious of the difficulties of securing agreement on key or even less crucial issues. Consensus has its price. If that price is the absence of taking the right and necessary decision or to postpone the right decisions, or to dilute the right decisions, one may wonder if the price to be paid is too high.

The OSCE needs more visibility among our citizens. As parliamentarians we have a permanent contact with our citizens and that broad spectrum referred to as “the Civil society”, I can reinforce what you already know; much of what we do is a well kept secret, that too few people in our countries know what the OSCE is or what the OSCE stands for, and what it is doing. And not only at the level of our citizens, but at a higher political level in our capitals, even parliaments, the OSCE does not seem to be given very much attention – if at all.

I would propose the idea of establishing OSCE information offices – similar to what the EU has established in its member and applicant countries - in all participating States of the OSCE with the double objective of increasing the visibility of our Organisation and, second, reducing the apparent “stigma” of some member States that host OSCE offices or missions. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly as a unique link between citizens and governments, can assist these potential information

offices in making the general public aware both of the existence and of the importance of this organisation.

Mr. Chairman,

The Assembly will continue working to assure we are a reliable partner contributing to the success of the OSCE. We will continue our programme of OSCE Field Mission visits, continue to provide parliamentary leadership for election monitoring projects, continue to support the work of our ad hoc committees dealing with specific critical problems, continue to strengthen the dialogue between and among our own parliamentarians through the organisation of our meetings and conferences, and –very importantly – make every effort to increase and improve the co-operation between the governmental structures of the OSCE and the more than three hundred elected parliamentarians that provide the OSCE with a firm democratic foundation.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has taken the political lead in monitoring parliamentary and presidential elections in the OSCE area for over a decade. We successfully cooperate with the technical experts of the ODIHR and look forward to meeting its new Director when he or she takes up the post. But quite frankly, at the political level, without the political expertise, credibility, and visibility that the elected parliamentarians bring to the monitoring missions the OSCE would not have attained the dominant and credible position that enjoys today in election monitoring.

The Parliamentary Assembly's Working Group on Belarus, the Parliamentary Team on Moldova, the Democracy Team on Kosovo, and the ad hoc Committee on Abkhazia (Georgia), promote political dialogue and seek cooperation in areas of conflict in the OSCE area. The Initiative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to visit OSCE field presences is designed to better understand the work of the OSCE and to determine ways in which the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can better contribute to the essential work of the OSCE in the field.

The Parliamentary Assembly also continues to pay special importance to the relations between the OSCE and its Mediterranean and Asian Partners. The Conference on Security in the Mediterranean held in Madrid last October and the Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum to be held in Almaty next year clearly show our commitment. The events and aftermath of 11 September 2001 have highlighted both the importance of security in Asia and in the Mediterranean to security in the OSCE area as a whole as well as the need for increased dialogue among OSCE member governments and parliaments with our Partners.

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished Ministers,

We are grateful to the OSCE in Vienna for hosting our Winter Meeting next February and providing it with appropriate infrastructure. We look forward to the active participation of the next Chairman in Office and other senior OSCE officials in a continuing dialogue with OSCE parliamentarians.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's office recently opened in Vienna will enhance our cooperation by establishing closer links with the OSCE structures in Vienna, mainly the OSCE Secretariat and the Permanent Council. My contacts with the Chairman in Office of the OSCE in the past months have been very positive. There is, of course, always room for improvement. Our common objective is to make this Organisation more efficient, more visible, and a more effective in our common work.

I will conclude by welcoming the Netherlands to the Chairmanship in Office of the OSCE for 2003. We look very much forward to working with our Dutch friends in promoting the principles that make the OSCE an unique Organisation. The OSCE still has an enormous potential to help all of Europe become an area of peace, stability and co-operation. We must meet the many challenges we collectively face. Porto is a vital step along that long route.

Thank you



