

***Address by Mr Jaap de Hoop Scheffer,
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"The importance of the parliamentary dimension"

On the occasion of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Winter Meeting

Vienna, 20 February 2003

(Introduction)

Mr President, distinguished delegates,

There are a number of reasons why I am particularly honoured to address this Assembly. The first is that as a former parliamentarian myself, I fully appreciate the scrutiny your average speaker normally has to undergo before he is invited to stand behind a parliamentary lectern to be heard and listened to for half an hour. The second is that now, as a member of government, I am well aware of the critical as well as complementary role parliament plays when it comes to the formulation and implementation of good policy. Frankly, I had always wondered if changing jobs from being a member of parliament to being a government minister ought to be considered a good career move. In fact, I am not at all convinced it is. Because I know one thing for sure: there is only so much one can achieve through government alone. So it is with some nostalgia and envy that I address this distinguished audience.

(Achieve results)

Mr President, in Porto last December you made a memorable comment which I think made the point even better. You said: "*Activity is no substitute for achievement*". I could not agree more. The way I –representating the Dutch Chairmanship- see it, this means that we should focus on results and not get lost in an endless succession of meetings and talks without end. Activity in itself is important, but only in so far as it is needed to achieve what we want. This is where parliamentary activity comes into play. Because when governmental and parliamentary actions are taken in parallel, more and better results can be achieved. We have seen this at critical moments in the past, such as during the constitutional crisis in Albania a number of years ago. Certainly, the dialogue between the OSCE Chair and governments is often a vital step towards creating more stable and democratic environments; but when your voices are added to those of governments it will make it easier to achieve that goal. What is more, you add crucial legitimacy to our dialogue at government level.

(Redesigning the security architecture)

The good news is that awareness of your importance is growing. As Chair, the Netherlands hopes to raise that awareness even further. It hopes to involve you in implementing an ambitious agenda and it invites you to think about the issues affecting the future of the OSCE. Foremost among those is the redesign of our total security architecture and the positioning of the OSCE. I am convinced of the OSCE's added value in comparison with existing organisations such as NATO, the EU and the Council of Europe. None of those is capable of replacing the OSCE's key assets. But we still need to think about a clear definition of their respective roles.

There are many more subjects and proposals on which this Chair hopes to hear your views. For instance, on how to give focus and shape to the new Annual Security Review Conference that this Chair must deliver. Or on the strategy needed to meet the new threats and challenges of the twenty-first century that the Porto Ministerial asked for. Or, thirdly and of an entirely different nature: on the growing interest outside the OSCE area in principles and activities of the OSCE. In that context, it is interesting to note the recent request by the G8 to consider OSCE involvement with Afghanistan.

And I could list other issues on which your views would be welcomed.

(Reinforcing democratic structures)

In short, your wisdom and insights are needed on many levels. If there is nothing that can replace experience, there is certainly nothing that can replace *parliamentary* experience. In many OSCE regions a reinforcement of democratic structures and institutions is urgently needed. That is something that cannot be achieved through government channels alone. It requires parliamentary action as well. Separate from, but complementary to our efforts vis-à-vis the governments concerned. That is why the Dutch Chair welcomes the convening of the Trans-Asian Parliamentary Assembly to be held in Almaty in May. That is highly significant. For it is a clear signal that this Assembly is fully committed to the very regions where urgent tasks lie in the future.

(Human security)

Mr President, this Assembly contributes to preventing the OSCE from existing in a void and floating freely with no connection to the peoples of its fifty-five participating States. Their voices can and should be heard through you. The Dutch Chair is committed to listening to them. And as it does, it hears an unmistakable message: increasingly in this post-Cold War world, concerns about safety and security have been brought close to home of many citizens. The threats that today face citizens across the OSCE region give renewed relevance to the OSCE: threats such as terrorism; human trafficking; illegal immigration; xenophobia... They create urgent and legitimate concerns about human security that affect all our citizens. And what affects them is obviously of direct relevance to the Parliamentary Assembly.

It will come as no surprise then that the Dutch Chair is placing these threats high on the OSCE's agenda. Let me single out one issue that I just mentioned and that will receive our particular attention this year.

(Trafficking)

Human trafficking. The slave trade of modern times. One of the most pressing and complex human rights issues in the OSCE region. It reaches across borders to affect nearly every OSCE country. "Trafficking" includes the widespread phenomenon of trafficking in women and children for forced prostitution or other sexual exploitation. It also includes trafficking for other forms of forced labour or servitude such as sweatshops, domestic or agricultural labour, and forced or fictitious 'mail-order' marriages. The trauma and social disruption caused by these criminal activities is beyond description. Trafficking strikes at the OSCE's core activities: the promotion of human security, the rule of law, and social and political stability. Already weak institutions are further weakened by trafficking.

The OSCE is well equipped to deal with human trafficking. Because it involves human rights abuses, poor border controls, unlawful treatment of victims, ineffective police forces and other shortcomings of weak states, it touches upon everything the OSCE field missions are all about. What's more, the OSCE and its missions deal not only with the human dimension of human trafficking but with the economic one as well: the illegal money flows resulting from it. The Netherlands will therefore push to give human trafficking higher priority on the OSCE's list of focus areas.

There are already some excellent examples of what concrete measures the OSCE can take to fight human trafficking. For instance: preventive campaigns including the economic empowerment of potential victims (in the Ukraine, women receive special training and education); better prosecution of criminals through training programmes for police and legal authorities (such as happens on the Balkans); or the set up of witness protection programmes for victims (as is being done in Serbia).

Again, we will need to work with other organisations to be most effective. In Ioannina this week, we had a joint OSCE-EU debate about human trafficking. That is the way forward. Using the particular assets of the respective organisations –in the case of the OSCE, expertise and field missions- and then formulating a well-coordinated strategy.

(Role of the Parliamentary Assembly)

Mr President, allow me to get back to where I started: the complementary roles of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Chairmanship.

I should like to name a few concrete examples of the contribution this Assembly and its members make and could continue to make in order to achieve our common goals.

(Influence new legislation)

One: this Parliamentary Assembly can influence new legislation. By making your voices heard, by providing your democratic expertise: you can push governments to strengthen their laws and democratic institutions or to make new ones. This has been helpful in the past and it will be particularly helpful in the future. Especially in the fight against human trafficking, where the appropriate legal framework is often missing.

(Assist in election monitoring)

Second: you can assist in election monitoring, as you have already done on numerous occasions. There is no better way of staffing OSCE observation missions than by those who know the ropes, who have fought elections themselves. I am well aware that these missions are often time consuming, but I do not think the OSCE can do without you on these missions in the future.

(Strengthen democracy)

Three: you can strengthen democracy in countries and areas with democratic deficits. This Parliamentary Assembly has been instrumental in bringing about changes in various regions. The Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum testifies to that. By continuing this inter-parliamentary dialogue you can bring about even more progress in each of the three OSCE dimensions and thus contribute further to regional security.

(Exert behind-the-scenes pressure)

Four: you can exert effective behind-the-scenes pressure on governments that deny basic rights to opposition parties and their leaders. The members of this Assembly should be effective defenders of such rights. By calling on governments to meet their responsibilities and by speaking on behalf of those who are denied their freedom of speech you can keep the international focus where it should be.

(Amplify the voice of the Chairman-in-Office)

Finally: you can amplify the voice of the Chair. In this context, I should like to refer to Chechnya. We are presently engaged in talks with Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov on the possibility to arrange for a longer term constructive engagement of the OSCE in Chechnya. Given the need to normalise the situation in that region, I am sure that you would also welcome a role of the OSCE that could contribute to the re-establishment of the rule of law, democratic institutions and social reconstruction.

(Conclusion)

Mr President, distinguished delegates. The Dutch OSCE Chair wishes to combine ambition with realism. There are many issues that demand the OSCE's

20 February 2002

attention as political and international developments continue to dramatically change our environment. We are confident that we can make a difference on some of these, or at least we can make a start. Most importantly, we recognise the significance of your involvement in the OSCE's work. It is this same realism that brings me to conclude that the parliamentary dimension is essential to the OSCE and to the overall effectiveness of its role.