

“A mountain bike rather than a Ferrari”

An Italian swan song

Ambassador Lenzi visiting Petra, Jordan’s “rose-red city in the rock”, after a Mediterranean Seminar in Aqaba in October 2003



BY GUIDO LENZI

I will start with a passage from an article in the *Economist*: “A Swede, a Bulgarian and an Irishman meet in a mountain village guarded by Georgians wearing American uniforms. What sounds like the start of a joke is reality in Omalo, on Georgia’s frontier with Russia, where eagles usually outnumber foreign visitors.”

This is how I will always remember the OSCE, an organization that reaches parts other organizations cannot (paraphrasing the famous ad of a Dutch beer company — and here, I tip my hat to the European Union Presidency).

The OSCE is also a hands-on organization, where personal effort, initiative, commitment and inventiveness dispense with any structural automata. It remains the eminently politico-diplomatic instrument that has dramatically changed the fabric of Europe over the past 30 years. This is a place where the art and craft of diplomacy find their most suitable setting, where networking prevails over hierarchical and bureaucratic reflexes.

For more than 20 years — more than half of my professional life — I have been involved, without interruption, in multilateral diplomacy. Never have I been as comfortable as in the OSCE, where through fair weather and foul, we maintain a strong sense that the work we do is worthwhile. In fact, we often behave as though our personal involvement can *actually* make a difference.

The Organization is no Ferrari, rather a mountain bike that is much more useful on rugged terrain. However, this implies a shared will to ride it and steer it, with hardly any room available in the back seat. In terms of good governance, a concept that has become so dear to us, one could say that one obtains results from the OSCE only to the extent that one invests in it. The OSCE’s good practices make it akin to a participant sport, where one can sit out the action from time to time, but where one cannot just stand permanently on the sidelines and then complain that the game observed is not to one’s liking.

The OSCE is a work in progress, part of the evolution of the species that is currently under way in every other international security organization. Compared to them, the OSCE may not project an impressive silhouette and its deliberations are not necessarily decisive. Geared as it is to the production and assimilation of consensus in a comprehensive manner — from the prevention of crises, through conflict resolution, to post-conflict rehabilitation — the OSCE is serving its very specific purpose, and will continue to do so.

Essentially, it is a politico-diplomatic, behavioural mechanism (another one of our beloved buzzwords!), based on a gradual weaving of the fabric of international law. And the production of international law is

what the whole international community is now engaged in, under the name of “effective multilateralism”, which even the European Union has embroidered on its banner.

This was a wonderful and highly stimulating environment to be in. I wish to thank many sparring partners, holding diverse positions, with whom I shared more exalting moments than depressing ones, who always challenged me to fast footwork. If this weren’t a metaphor, my doctor would be very happy. I had to tell him that my job implied long sittings and explain that the Organization relied on a process of sedimentation akin to geology — constantly piling up and washing out ideas and initiatives, but slowly and surely changing our landscape. Among 55 nations, that is no mean feat, the full value of which future generations will recognize. I leave with the conviction that the OSCE is good for the EU, as the latter develops its political profile and its Security Strategy.

Finally, my gratitude also goes to the Italians working in the Secretariat, institutions and field operations, who are now much more numerous than when I first arrived, and who have all been working hard to promote the good name of the OSCE and, in the process, the reputation of my country.

To all of you, *arrivederci!*

Ambassador Guido Lenzi, who assumed the post of Head of the Permanent Mission of Italy to the OSCE in October 2000, delivered these parting remarks to the Permanent Council on 22 July 2004. A law graduate from the University of Florence, his diplomatic postings have included Algiers, Lausanne, London, Moscow and New York. From 1995 to 1999, he served as the Western European Union’s Director of the Institute for Security Studies in Paris.