Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Is the OSCE relevant in the 21 Century?

Secretary General of the OSCE, H.E. Marc Perrin de Brichambaut

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends of Chatham House.

I am delighted to be here with you this evening and wish to thank Chatham House for the kind invitation to address again this distinguished audience. This is a renowned place of debate and discussion – where ideas and opinions are aired and argued – and as such I always feel very much at home here. The OSCE is not always the best known of international organisations and so this evening I hope to reflect upon, what it is and how it works. I look forward to a rich discussion, and welcome your questions and comments following my presentation.

The question that our hosts have posed this evening is: "Is the OSCE relevant in the 21st century?" As the Organization's Secretary General, it will be no surprise that my answer is a resounding "yes." But I hope this evening to explain why I believe this unique organization remains necessary, and deserves greater input from its primary stakeholders, including the European Union and its member states, the United States and the Russian Federation.

First of all, the OSCE remains relevant because its historical mission has not been completed. The great vision of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act for a rules-based international order stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok, and the challenge and hopes of the 1990 Paris Charter, for "a new era of democracy, peace and unity" remain aspirations rather than realities. At last year's Astana Summit, OSCE heads of state and government reaffirmed the ambitious vision of a "free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community." They also acknowledged that much work that still needs to be done. Here I want to stress the word Security Community as this goes to the heart of the deliberations in Astana.

Secondly, the OSCE's broad membership and its comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to security remain unique on the European security stage. The Organization is not a supra-national governing body or a military alliance, and it cannot do everything the EU and NATO can do. On the other hand, however, the EU and NATO cannot take the place of the OSCE, where Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, all of the states of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia have come together as equals on the basis of freely agreed commitments and common goals and principles. If this organization did not exist today, it would be sorely missed, and I am not sure it could be re-created on terms that are so consonant with what we commonly understand to be "Western" interests and values.

Finally, the experience gained and the tools developed by the OSCE in supporting democratic transitions within its participating States can be useful resources, not only in parts of the OSCE area where such transitions remain incomplete, but also in our 12 Partner countries, which include Tunisia and Egypt. This is all the more pertinent given current

developments in North Africa and the Middle East. We of course exist in world where there is a multiplicity of international actors and to be sure, others, such as the EU and the Council of Europe, also have abundant resources in this area. But the OSCE has developed unique expertise in areas such as constitutional and electoral reform and democratic policing. Its inclusive membership also offers a cultural diversity that our Partners may find interesting – Turkey, which has balanced Islam with secular democratic values, and Kazakhstan, which served as the Organization's first majority-Muslim Chairmanship just last year, to name just a few.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When one is asked to present the core tasks of the OSCE today, one has to acknowledge that while much has been achieved, there is a lot of "unfinished business". The conflict in Georgia in 2008 between two participating States of the OSCE, the crisis in Kyrgyzstan of June last year, the ongoing tensions and tragic loss of life associated with the protracted conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh, all point to the fact that the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community identified by our leaders as a common vision is still very much a work in progress and that the concept of building a security community is still an important project.

The OSCE is no longer a framework designed primarily to prevent a single, cataclysmic East-West confrontation. Despite clear remaining differences and disagreements on individual issues, our overall work climate is no longer one of direct confrontation.

The OSCE is also no longer predominantly a vehicle for democratic transition within its participating States. In some participating States

democratic transition has been stalled and it is clear that there are divergent views and deep disagreements as to the implementation of OSCE commitments.

The current situation in Belarus is an example of such differences of views. The authorities in Belarus have refuted the conclusions and recommendations of ODIHR and have not given their consent for the extension of the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk – in spite of the clear wish of an overwhelming majority of participating States that the Office should remain to carry out its mandate. But where such divergences exist, the OSCE offers a platform for its participating States to express their dissatisfaction. This week, A group of 14 OSCE participating States today sent a letter to the authorities of Belarus, triggering the Organization's “Moscow Mechanism”.

The Mechanism, established in 1991 and amended in 1993, can be initiated if one OSCE participating State, supported by at least nine others, "considers that a particularly serious threat to the fulfilment of the provisions of the (OSCE) human dimension has arisen in another participating State". It allows for such investigation to be launched without consensus and independently of the OSCE Chairmanship, Institutions and decision-making bodies. This is the seventh time that the Moscow Mechanism has been used

So if the OSCE is no longer the instrument of détente that it was in the 1970s and -80s, and is not exactly the engine of democratic transformation that it was in the 1990s, then what is it and why does it still matter?

This was the question that animated the so-called "Corfu Process," which was launched in the summer of 2009. This process of dialogue on the wider questions of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security was born out of the dissatisfaction of the Russian Federation with the European security architecture and President Medvedev's call for a broad, strategic discussion on European security. It came at a time when events – the August 2008 war in the Caucasus, the gas crises of the following winter, the continuing challenges posed by instability in and around Afghanistan, leadership changes in Washington and Moscow and the subsequent "reset" of U.S.-Russian relations – had highlighted the need for broad re-engagement with a far more inclusive set of actors than one could find within the EU or NATO.

The Astana Summit, which was held on the 1st and 2nd of December last year, went further in addressing this issue, looking at role of the OSCE and its place within the wider Euro-Atlantic security architecture. This Summit was held due to the political will and persistence of the Kazakh Chairmanship. It was well attended by the Heads of State or Government and generated a new impetus for the Organization. Despite the largely negative press coverage of the Summit, tangible progress was made in clarifying our leaders' common vision of the OSCE and in outlining priorities. In the run up to and at Astana, the EU, the US and the Russian Federation engaged in intensive negotiation on a wide range of issues. They successfully agreed on language that later became the foundation of the "Astana Commemorative Declaration." This high-level political engagement and re-commitment to the norms, values and principles of the Organization – at a time when they had come under increasingly open challenge by notions like "sovereign democracy" – was a positive step forward. I recommend that you all read this document. It reflects the

challenges and issues that the current Chairmanship- Lithuania – is now trying to address in Vienna.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to move to my second point.

The OSCE is, at heart, a marriage of two ideas. It is a laboratory of ideas. It is, first, a unique values-based organization, built on agreed standards and commitments that cover the 3 dimensions. At the same time, the OSCE is founded on the idea of inclusion and the principle of consensus; that is, one of its strengths lies in the fact that States of different cultures, with different historical experiences and, indeed, different interests, agree to work together as equals. Diplomats from the 56 participating States sit around the table twice a week in Vienna, debating and discussing the issues of the day. The inclusiveness of the OSCE is unparalleled by other security organizations in the Euro-Atlantic area. While it often makes decisions harder to reach, it lends those decisions a unique legitimacy.

The OSCE approaches security through the prism of specific commitments undertaken in the three security "dimensions": politico-military, economic-environmental and human (encompassing human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law). This approach is manifest every day in the activities of the OSCE's Institutions – the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – and in the activities of its Vienna-based Secretariat and its 17 field operations. The OSCE has developed a number of institutions which are not replicated in any other regional organization.

The OSCE field operations deserve special mention, as they demonstrate the added value of the Organization in a concrete and tangible way. The OSCE is present across South Eastern Europe, Central Asia the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe. It is present in particular with its field presence, in some cases where the EU and others are not. And its presence is underpinned by the fact that in all cases, its host countries sit at the table in Vienna as full members of the Organization, who share in the responsibility for its activities. In addition, in a context of so-called "enlargement fatigue" within the EU, in particular in South Eastern Europe, the OSCE's field operations provide much needed support to the democratic reform agendas of individual countries that still aspire to eventual membership in the EU.

With such a broad membership and such a comprehensive agenda, it is no wonder that we face many tensions inside the OSCE. But this is nothing new. At its very inception in 1975 the Organization was created to air and manage such tensions – between its participating States, and between some of the very principles on which it was founded (such as territorial integrity and self-determination of peoples). These tensions today mirror nothing more than those occurring in the world outside the Vienna Hofburg, across Greater Europe. They need to be tackled and continuously dealt with. Ignoring them will not make them go away.

It is no secret that in Astana last year, failure to agree on language regarding protracted conflicts resulted in participating States not being able to find consensus on a detailed "framework for action" mapping the road ahead for the Organization. This is a fact of life that actually demonstrates the need for the existence of a forum that provides a platform for

continuous dialogue on contentious issues. The OSCE is plays an important role in the relevant negotiating formats related to the protracted conflicts, in some cases, such as the Minsk Group, taking the leading role.

Finally, the third area of relevance I wish to share with you this evening is about to be put into action with the visit of the Chairperson-in-Office, Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Ažubalis, to Tunisia next week – that is outreach and the offer to share our expertise and experience with our Partners for Co-operation.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democratic principles and the rule of law was placed at the very top of CSCE/OSCE agenda (as a brief glance at the 1990 Charter of Paris will confirm). The Organization's core tasks were to support post-communist countries in their transition to democracy, including by resolving violent conflicts that flared up across parts of the OSCE area and preventing the emergence of new ones. For more than 20 years, the OSCE has accumulated a wealth of experience and expertise, as well as a comprehensive toolbox, that have enabled us to assist our own participating States in their democratic transition processes. Countries in South East and East Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia continue to benefit from this.

Not surprisingly, then, sharing OSCE norms, principles and commitments and encouraging Partners to implement them voluntarily has been the core of the OSCE Partnership for Co-Operation from the very beginning. Today, the OSCE's core values clearly are clearly resonating in the popular demands for more democratic, prosperous and accountable societies that sparked recent events in North Africa and the Middle East. The ongoing

changes in the region present us with an enormous challenge. But they also present a unique opportunity to translate OSCE ideas into practice. There is a growing willingness among our participating States to assist our Mediterranean Partners in their democratic transition, should they express such an interest, and the Lithuanian Chairmanship has exercised clear leadership in this area. The OSCE can play its part but it cannot do it alone. Our efforts must be closely co-ordinated with others, first and foremost with the UN. But the OSCE itself offers unique expertise, and its membership offers a number of cultural models (Turkey, Kazakhstan) that might prove particularly relevant in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE is a light structure, flexible and resilient but often fragile. In some respects, it remains more a project than an institution. But it is a high maintenance, complex project, and one that requires a high degree of sustained engagement. If it is to carry out the mission entrusted to it at the Astana Summit last December and implement the specific tasks of interest to individual participating States, it needs the appropriate political and financial resources. It cannot afford to be left to benign neglect. If it is, its relevance may indeed diminish.

Thank you for your attention.