

The OSCE buckles down to work on its expanded 2007 agenda



BY MARTIN NESIRKY AND DOV LYNCH

Ministerial Council meetings rarely lighten the burden of the OSCE, but they usually provide direction.

December's meeting in Brussels was no exception. Ministers from the 56 participating States agreed on an expanded agenda encompassing all three areas, or dimensions, of security and took decisions that go some way towards reforming the Organization. All give guidance to this year's Spanish Chairmanship and to the OSCE as a whole.

"Belgium has put in a lot of effort, across the board so to speak, in restoring a better balance between the three dimensions, the three pillars on which the OSCE is based," said Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, who was the Chairman-in-Office in 2006 and

host of the Ministerial Council meeting at the vast Brussels Exhibition Centre (Heysel/Heizel) on the outskirts of the Belgian capital.

In the politico-military sphere, the Ministers agreed that the OSCE should work further to tackle the problem of small arms and light weapons, notably illicit trafficking in them by air. [Meeting in Vienna on 21 March, experts discussed developing a mechanism that would enable an exchange of information on regulations and national legislation concerning import and export controls relating to the air transport sector. The possibility of developing a best-practice guide was also explored.]

The OSCE will also work with others on implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004), which seeks to pre-

Outgoing Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, consults the family photo arrangement at the Ministerial Council meeting in Brussels.
Photo: Belga/Benoit Doppagne

vent or eliminate the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Counter-terrorism, a priority for the Spanish Chairmanship, remains the central focus as the OSCE explores ways to prevent the criminal or terrorist use of passports and the Internet. Russia and the United States will co-sponsor a conference in Vienna from 31 May to 1 June on how the private and public sectors can work together to tackle terrorism.

“Spain is a country that has endured barbarity, which it is taking steps to counter with great political determination while at the same time calling within the Organization for recognition and protection of victims,” said Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos in Brussels.

On economic and environmental matters, the ministers agreed that the Organization should build further on the work accomplished in 2006 on transport, particularly in Central Asia. Experts will meet on this subject in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, possibly in October, highlighting the role of transport in the broader sphere of security.

The Ministers also agreed that the Permanent Council, the OSCE’s main regular decision-making body, should promote dialogue on energy security and help raise awareness about the work of the Group of Eight on climate change.

A high-profile conference on combating discrimination will take place in Bucharest on 7 and 8 June, and Spain will also host a youth forum before the Ministerial Council

meeting in Madrid. Both events are in line with the ministers’ decisions in Brussels in the realm of human security. Action to combat trafficking also figured prominently at the Brussels meeting, and it is expected that there will be a focus in 2007 on combating the sexual exploitation of children.

Since anti-trafficking efforts cut across several areas of security and tie in with the fight against organized crime, Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut has created a task force to help build expertise in this area.

The role of the Secretary General has been adjusted slightly in some areas as part of the reforms agreed on in Brussels to strengthen the Organization’s effectiveness. He was also asked to roll out “performance-based programme budgeting”, which is intended to make it easier to measure how well the Organization achieves its objectives. A new three-committee structure has been introduced under the Permanent Council to help balance the three dimensions of security and to improve preparatory work.

The Ministers could not reach the required consensus on Kazakhstan’s proposal to chair the OSCE in 2009, but decided instead to return to the offer at the latest at the next Ministerial Council, to be held on 29 and 30 November in Madrid.

Martin Nesirky is OSCE Spokesperson and Dov Lynch is Senior Adviser to the Secretary General.



Karel De Gucht and Miguel Ángel Moratinos with Croatian Foreign Minister Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and Greek Foreign Minister Theodora Bakoyannis.

BELGA/RENIT DORPAGNE



THE CHAIRMANSHIP

A new Don Quixote waiting in the wings

BY AMBASSADOR BERTRAND DE CROMBRUGGHE

When we finalized the impressive number of texts in Brussels addressing terrorism, organized crime, exploitation of human beings, and issues such as transportation, energy security, migration, tolerance, and freedom of the media, to name but a few subjects, there was applause, even a short moment of blissful happiness. I thought: “Maybe the delegations are with us after all.”

To be frank with you, it has been — for the Chairmanship in Brussels, for myself and for my team in Vienna — an uphill battle throughout the year. It was a difficult battle, but also an exciting one, as the quest for a

peak or a summit always is. So, no complaints — we had our share of satisfaction.

The long climb to the summit itself warmed our hearts. We figured that Sisyphus had been a happy man. We reckoned that slowly, after all, the OSCE might march ahead towards good sense. We also felt that political immobility was not conceivable, that we constantly needed to move forward, with all the power of human intelligence.

Do some delegations still object? Maybe, and if that is the case, we apologize in advance but do not feel disturbed.

The French fabulist Jean de la Fontaine recounted a wonderful story about a miller who travels down a path in legendary Provence with his son and his mule. A first group of travellers he meets comments on

Sharing a light moment: (seated) outgoing OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht; Walter Stevens, deputy head on the Foreign Minister’s cabinet; (standing) Ambassador de Crombrughe; Sonya Van Nieuwenhuyze, administrative assistant at the Belgian delegation in Vienna; and Pierre Chevalier, Special Envoy of the Belgian Chairman-in-Office.

Photo: Belga/Benoit Doppagne

how stupid he is to let the animal off so lightly. So the miller climbs astride it. A second group of travellers remarks on how shameful it is that the child has to go on foot. So the miller dismounts and lifts his son onto the animal. A third group of travellers does not understand why the old man is doing the walking, not the young boy. So he climbs back onto the mule, but this time, with the boy riding behind him. On seeing this, a fourth group of travellers bewails the fact that the poor animal is overloaded and is being ill-treated, and threatens to denounce the miller.

“He must be mad in his head, he who hopes to please every one and his father,” concludes de la Fontaine.

Hardly any similarity with the OSCE! Everybody wants to govern, nobody wants to be a citizen. To use an ancient Greek concept, where then is the *polis*?

We are 56 participating States, a “wide-body” organization, and thoroughly decentralized at that, with numerous ramifications operating in almost complete freedom. We are an organization barely tolerating leadership.

By the way, and here I open a parenthesis, one of the pleasures of the Chairmanship is to receive all kinds of mail, some less related to the OSCE than others, some funnier than others. At the very beginning of 2006, I received a letter that I promised myself I would share with you in due course. It is from a certain Mr. Martin John Callanan in London. I have no clue who this chap is or what his connection to the OSCE might be.

His letter reads very simply: “Dear Chairman, I respect your authority.” Wonderful! How did the chap get this into his mind, I truly wondered! It seemed like a promising start to me, but I can assure you, it only inspired a short and wild dream, nothing more. I did not divulge it early in this Chairmanship. I feared I might be misunderstood.

But back to our subject: The freedom of action enjoyed by our institutions, field operations, representatives, seconded personnel and the like is truly inspiring. No doubt, some very good and useful work is being achieved every day. I personally never fail to stress this on every suitable occasion. Yet, it is also true that — as is noted by those who have grown familiar with the operation of our Organization — continuity and consistency are not the OSCE’s strong points. The system insufficiently supports the decentralized units while the free creativity of the latter more often than not remains small-scale and short-lived, if we ever hear about it at all.

Somebody once told me that the OSCE looked like a stupid insect, spending half of its lifetime producing the cocoon it needs and the other half, destroying it. That probably is an exaggeration, but nevertheless an image to ponder.

Throughout the year, the Chairmanship runs from one corner of the OSCE to the other, attending to emergencies, battling interference, unable to rely on any natural convergence of a myriad initiatives, struggling to keep some kind of line in the actions undertaken and then being at pains to explain what has happened, even when it would not quite understand itself.

Freedom of initiative may be a key concept in our system. However, without any structure, without a minimum of order, the OSCE cannot deliver the durable services that participating States rightfully expect from it.

Paul Claudel once exclaimed: “Oh Lord, I am free! Liberate me from my freedom!” The OSCE today risks reaching the stage where it will succumb to its excessive decentralization, where its ramifications will act against each other. Is this not what we witnessed during the cartoon crisis? The decisions taken in Brussels go some way towards addressing the decentralization issue. They should be followed up thoroughly.

I may sound apocalyptic but I am not worried. The reason is simple: the calendar. Although the OSCE Chairmanship is a demanding and thankless experience, there is always someone around the corner, on 1 January, ready to rise up to the task and to take it over.

“There always is, somewhere in our world, a chivalrous knight, a new Don Quixote, some obscure martyr with clumsy kindness, with awkward probity, with excessively transparent ingenuity, some noble mind fooled by over-generous illusions, some sublime being who in exchange for his gentle and affectionate virtues, will receive only brutality, kicks, punches and blows ...

“Do you know someone like that? I tell you, I do, and I revere him. He is mad, but then, too, he is the elite of humankind.”

(Thank you, Cervantes, for these very nice quotations.)

Carlos Sánchez de Boado, I solemnly transfer to you the attributes of the Chairmanship: the gavel of course, but also the cushion — the one destined to decorate the “conflict-prevention couch”, which you will always have to keep in your office. That couch with the cushion as the legend goes, has the power to turn visitors away from litigious intentions and make them work for peace, hence for the OSCE and hence for the Chairmanship.

The cushion is also good as a shield against the kicks, punches and blows.

Good luck, as from 1 January 2007!

This article is adapted from the light-hearted remarks of Ambassador Bertrand de Crombrughe to representatives of participating States at the Hofburg on 21 December 2006. The occasion was the end of his term as Chairman of the Permanent Council during the Belgian Chairmanship.