

The OSCE's future noble residence

BY PATRICIA N. SUTTER

A rambling but unpretentious-looking early nineteenth-century *palais* in the heart of Vienna is set to become the permanent quarters of the OSCE.

Developments have been progressing smoothly since December 2001, when Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel met then-OSCE Secretary General Ján Kubiš to discuss the conditions under which Austria would provide the Organization with its own dedicated premises.

By February 2005, Austrian Federal President Heinz Fischer was ready to announce details of the almost €32 million-project. "As the host country, Austria remains committed to ensuring that the OSCE is strong and effective," he told OSCE parliamentarians at the Hofburg.

"If you take a walk towards the city centre, you will see, just a few hundred metres from here, clear evidence of our efforts: Renovation work is under way to create a new headquarters for the OSCE in the historic Palais Pálffy at Wallnerstrasse No. 6. I am confident that the Organization's identity and visibility will be enhanced by the new accommodations."

Members of OSCE delegations and senior managers in the Secretariat have been among the first visitors to the site. The seemingly unhurried pace of construction — of artisans carefully restoring some of the original décor, for example — can be deceiving: the completion date of November 2007 is on target.

When the OSCE Secretariat's more than 300 staff members move from a commercial complex on the Ringstrasse into a State-owned cultural jewel, it will have been some 14 years since the CSCE/OSCE Secretariat was relocated from Prague to Vienna, starting with a handful of personnel.



Wallnerstrasse No. 6 is getting a massive facelift.

The five storeys of the Wallnerstrasse building cover a total floor area of 9,180 square metres, almost double that of currently rented OSCE space. This will enable the offices of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to be under the same roof as the Secretariat.

"The challenge faced by the architects was converting the rooms into modern offices while preserving and restoring the historic character of the nearly 200-year-old building," says the Secretariat's Director for Management and Finance, Joe Hili, who is serving as director of the project.

"The working environment will be completely different because offices will revolve around an open-plan style. The aim is to make the best possible use of available space and natural light."

New features will include double-flooring, flexible partition walls, meeting rooms and a common staff area on every floor, three elevators, a drive-up reception for high-level visitors and delegates, and upgraded security arrangements.

Palais Pálffy on Wallnerstrasse — not to be confused with another Palais Pálffy on Josefsplatz — traces its origins to the fifteenth century. After it was destroyed by a fire, Hungarian nobleman Johann Count Pálffy von Erdöd commissioned French architect Pierre-Charles de Moreau to build a residence in its place.

Constructed between 1809 and 1813, the *palais* is considered a rare example of classical French villa architecture in Vienna. The Empire style of the interiors, designed by Raphael von Rigel, contrasts with the façade's almost stark simplicity. An original marble-decorated staircase, a grand banquet hall and three inner court yards evoke the life and times of the aristocracy of two centuries ago.

Time and again, participating States have expressed appreciation to the Government of Austria for its exceptional generosity as host country, not only in endowing the OSCE with a prestigious address that reflects its status as the world's largest regional security organization, but also in bearing most of the costs of refurbishment.

To ensure that the closing down of the old offices and the move to the new premises proceed smoothly, the Secretary General has created a Steering Committee comprising departmental representatives under the coordination of Philip Hatton, Deputy Director for Management and Finance.



Village Boats, oil on canvas, 2006

Global nomad, roving artist

When Mikhail Evstafiev sent out invitations to his first solo art exhibition in May, his colleagues had no idea what to expect. Some were familiar with his photography and knew about the novel he had published about the war in Afghanistan. But oil on canvas? Could these creations be up to par with his black-and-white images featured in serious photo-journalism books?

But even the most discriminating among his guests at the Hofburg Congress Centre were in for a revelation. The urban landscapes and remote villages in more than 30 paintings seemed hauntingly abandoned but still pulsated with life.

“Technique? Well, for now, I’ve abandoned brushes for a palette knife,” he told the *OSCE Magazine*. “Instead of imitating reality, I prefer

to interpret it, at times distorting it to achieve an emotional effect, playing with shapes, forms and colours, scratching a finished canvas to reveal the inner beauty of the layers beneath.”

He recalls a Moscow childhood surrounded by sculptors and artists in his mother’s and grandmother’s studios. Not to be outdone, his father taught him the basics of photography and unravelled the mysteries of the dark room.

After studying international journalism at Moscow State University, Mikhail pursued a career as a writer and photo-journalist with leading international news organizations. He covered the break-up of the Soviet Union, armed conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan and Transdniestria, and the political

scene at the Kremlin. Before joining the OSCE as a Press Officer, he worked in London and Washington, D.C.

In a sense, his Hofburg exhibition, entitled “Somewhere Else”, addresses a question many of his friends at the OSCE often ask themselves: “When years of travel pile up, does a home still exist? Or is home where one happens to be at the time?”

Mikhail adds another philosophical dimension to the puzzle: “How do you know when a painting is finished? The same way you know that it’s time to move on to a new destination.”

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Sunday Afternoon Stroll, oil on canvas, 2006



The Fire Escape, oil on canvas, 2006