



Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht

The year that was Restoring confidence and credibility to the OSCE

Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office in 2006, said that the year had been one of “relatively smooth and cautious sailing along well-charted coastlines and around well-recognized reefs”. In a recent address to participating States, he added that “reefs can be treacherous and seas can get rough at almost no notice” and called on political leaders to take responsibility for helping solve “frozen conflicts”, which threaten to erupt at any time. Reviewing the ambitious agenda in Brussels, he said the Belgian Chairmanship was all about restoring confidence in the OSCE as an effective instrument for peace and stability in Europe. Excerpts from Minister De Gucht’s remarks follow.

BY OSCE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE KAREL DE GUCHT

We are now nearing the end of our Chairmanship, and as we approach the Ministerial Council meeting, I will not attempt to draw up here a preliminary balance sheet of our work. I will merely review what our main objectives are for Brussels and the ambitious agenda we, collectively, have set for ourselves.

The years before the Ministerial Council meeting in Ljubljana in December 2005 were difficult and were surrounded by growing doubts as to the viability and indeed the *raison d’être* of the OSCE. Ljubljana helped clear the atmosphere. But the underlying fundamental issues threatening to create new rift lines within Europe are still there. They should be addressed.

This is why our main task throughout 2006 has been to restore confidence in the OSCE as an effective instrument for peace and stability throughout the whole of Europe through cooperation and preventive diplomacy and through initiatives promoting economic development, respect for human rights and democratic institutions.

True, there are other institutions active in these various fields, all claiming to be mutually supportive — and indeed they are, to a large extent. But the OSCE is unique not so much for its cross-dimensional approach as for the nature of its membership, extending beyond the traditional confines of Europe in geographic and cultural terms.

The OSCE was originally created as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) to mitigate the consequences of ideological confrontation in Europe. Then, in 1990, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe marked the rebirth of the continent on the basis of common democratic values and principles.

Today, the mission of the Organization is as much about giving concrete expression to these values and principles — so-called “good governance” — as it is about managing diversity within a vast group of countries. These are countries that are not, like the original set of members of the European Union, bound together by virtue of a common past and a common cultural heritage, but by the tribulations of an often tragic history.

What brought us together as a result of the Charter of Paris and the dissolution of the USSR is not so much the past as a set of standards, principles and commitments that we have adopted through a common accord, to lead us together into the twenty-first century. These principles are the bedrock on which we have formed a shared sense — even a *new* sense — of common purpose. No organization can live or, indeed, prosper without such a covenant.

It is in this spirit and in the light of the report issued in 2005 by the Panel of Eminent Persons that the Belgian Chairmanship intends to complete, with the help of all participating States, the mandate we received in Ljubljana on “strengthening the efficiency of the OSCE”.

Our goal is not just to adopt a number of practical measures, which, although useful, would have only a limited impact on the Organization’s political functioning — and here

I stress the word “political”. And neither is it our purpose to reform the OSCE’s time-tested institutions and mechanisms for the sake of reform or as a substitute for action. Nor do we see much point in mere bureaucratic reshuffling, although there is undoubtedly room for improvement.

More importantly, the purpose of the exercise is to turn the page of past doubts and mutual recriminations so as to restore confidence, political credibility and a sense of unity of purpose within the Organization.

Work on the proposed decisions for consideration by the Foreign Ministers who will convene in Brussels has been set into motion. These decisions will, I hope, be driven by a sense of vision and responsibility vis-à-vis the *acquis* of the OSCE and the principles and commitments which we have freely set for ourselves as participating States and as individual countries.

Turning to a topic related to the future of the OSCE — election observation and the expected report on this matter by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, as requested in Ljubljana — I do not need to stress once again the critical importance of this issue for all of us and for an Organization that has built its reputation around developing and strengthening democratic institutions. The international monitoring of electoral processes is key to the credibility and to the legitimacy of a process that is at the root of any form of democratic regime.

Brussels could be a good place to conclude the Ljubljana exercise on strengthening the efficiency of the OSCE with a strong reaffirmation of the long-standing principles and commitments binding us together individually and collectively as participating States dedicated to free, fair and transparent elections.

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Following the cataclysmic upheavals that Europe has experienced during the past 15 years, one is pleased to be able to say that the OSCE area appears to be generally at peace. Still, the retreating tide of violence has left, here and there, a number of small islands of unresolved crises where latent violence threatens to spark fresh eruptions at any moment. The issue of “frozen conflicts” reminds us that peace is not something that is achieved once and for all, and that it must be attended to every day.

This Chairmanship has endeavoured — as have those preceding it — to promote progress through its good offices whenever the occasion has warranted it, relying on the diplomatic instruments and the field assets that the OSCE has developed over the years. It has done this, we regret to note, largely without conspicuous results.

In certain respects, hopes invested in a decisive breakthrough, for example, in Nagorno-Karabakh have been frustrated. Tensions in the South Caucasus remain very much alive and even alarming. Negotiations on the Transdniestrian conflict are deadlocked.

Nevertheless, there are encouraging prospects everywhere. Today, all the elements of a settlement are on the table. What is required at this point is an expression of political will. Accordingly, I am calling on persons in positions of political responsibility in the countries concerned to demonstrate their farsightedness and to discharge their responsibilities.

Obviously, the Chairmanship has no illusions about its



Moldova, 13 November 2006: As part of a fact-finding visit, more than 30 Heads of Delegation to the OSCE toured the Russian ammunition depot in Colbasna in the Transdniestrian region. Describing the visit as a “confidence-building measure”, Karel De Gucht said: “Further initiatives should be built on this until the complete withdrawal of all ammunition, as provided for by the commitments made at the 1999 Istanbul Summit.”

ability to settle everything in Brussels. What it does wish, however, is for the parties’ political authorities to make a maximum commitment to putting the negotiation process back on track and to reaching a solution. I am thinking in particular of the Transdniestrian conflict. The Chairmanship has offered specific ideas. It has invited the parties involved to engage in a dialogue. It is up to them to seize this opportunity.

Is it conceivable, not to say tolerable, that 15 years later, the frozen conflicts are still where they were — that is to say, frozen? Is it justifiable that this stagnation should lead to the paralysis of the entire security dimension of the OSCE? This situation is detrimental to the overall credibility of our Organization. Above all, it is harmful to the countries concerned and to their people, who are the ones who continue to pay the price. Brussels must not be a venue for sterile confrontation.

As everyone knows, peace, security and co-operation represent the central priorities of the OSCE. But the OSCE also represents a long-term vision. It is not so much a matter of building a common future in the strict sense of the term as it is of forging a shared concept of a greater Europe in which the human dimension is at the heart of society’s political organization.

The fourteenth Ministerial Council meeting will provide an opportunity to give political expression to a number of issues that the Chairmanship has wanted to focus attention to throughout the year — tolerance and mutual understanding, protection for human rights advocates, measures to combat trafficking in human beings and, of course, the rule of law.

Finally, I would like to thank the Governments and delegations in Vienna as well as the Secretary General and the members of the OSCE institutions and missions for the help and support they have been providing to the Chairmanship.

The fact is that, without the OSCE, Europe would today not be what it has become — a reunified continent and a continent at peace with itself. May yesterday’s achievements serve to inspire us in our efforts to ensure that tomorrow’s destiny is worthy of the aspirations of our peoples.

Spain's turn

Preserving a sense of common purpose

Expect focused pragmatism rather than a broad-brush revolution when Spain takes over the Chairmanship of the OSCE on 1 January 2007. The focus will be on fighting terrorism, tackling land degradation and water resources, and encouraging diversity and participation in pluralistic societies — all themes that draw on Spain's experience and geostrategic position. Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, the incoming Chairman-in-Office, met OSCE Spokesperson Martin Nesirky at the seventeenth-century Santa Cruz Palace, seat of the Spanish Foreign Ministry in Madrid, to talk about Spain's priorities for the year.

Martin Nesirky: Why did Spain want to assume the OSCE Chairmanship?

Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos: When the present Spanish Government came into office, we were aware of — let's put it this way — a striking anomaly: Spain, one of the most influential, internationally active members of the OSCE, had never before assumed responsibility for its Chairmanship.

The truth is, Spain has always been deeply involved in all OSCE policies and has of course always been unquestionably committed to the OSCE's goals and principles. I recall how important the Helsinki Final Act was for my country as were, later on, the review meetings of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), held in Madrid in 1983. Against this background, I consider it paradoxical that Spain has never had the responsibility for leading this Organization.

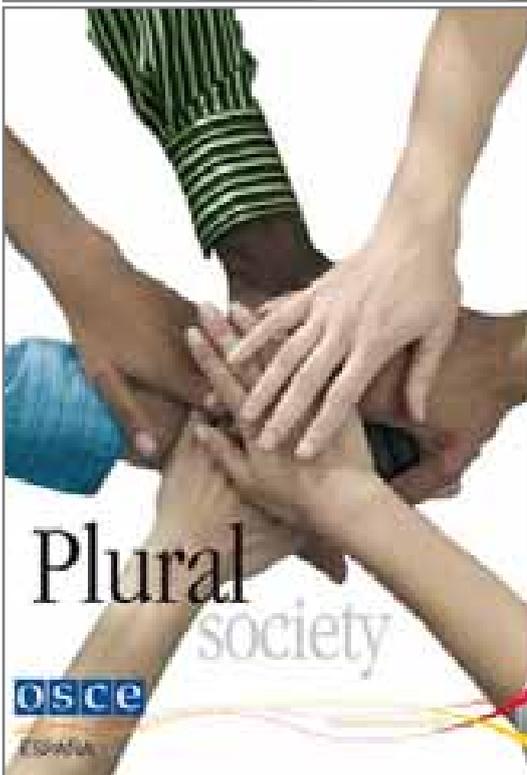
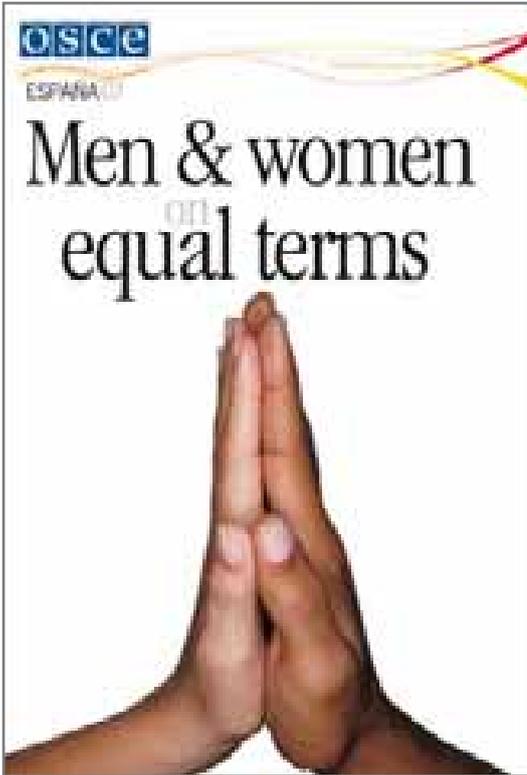
Let me also stress that Spain considers dialogue and co-operation as essential instruments for the orderly development of international relations and for the promotion of effective multilateralism.

What do you think Spain brings to the OSCE Chairmanship?

The OSCE is an organization in which members should feel they are entitled to the same rights and are bound by the same commitments and the same rules of engagement, so to speak. The Spanish Chairmanship will bring its own political impetus, as did previous chairmanships, to help the Organization adapt to the new challenges of the twenty-first century. I hope the reform process to strengthen the OSCE's effectiveness can be completed under the Belgian Chairmanship so that, in 2007, we can start leading an organization that is better prepared to meet its goals. If, for any reason, some tasks are left pending after the Ministerial Council meeting in Brussels, we will make every effort to complete them.

The Spanish Chairmanship can also bring greater sensitivity to all matters concerning the southern Mediterranean countries. When we talk about security and co-operation in Europe, we should not ignore the situation of our Mediterranean neighbours. Mediterranean issues should be placed at the very heart of our agenda. The OSCE principle of the indivisibility of security should be fully applied to our Partners for Co-operation.

From its own vantage point, with its specific "personality", Spain will contribute to the objectives of peace and security, which are



the crux of OSCE activities. We will try to reinforce the OSCE's role as a forum for dialogue and co-operation to avoid the conflicts and ideological confrontations that have been part of our past. We will do our best to uphold and give real meaning to what lies at the core of the OSCE's defining difference: electoral monitoring, the promotion of human rights and the whole range of issues that give the OSCE added value.

If I can explore that a bit further — what is the role of the OSCE, in Spain's view?

The OSCE's role is to maintain and promote stability and security. At the same time, we should make every effort to defend our values and principles. Our democratic convictions, our commitment to the rule of law, and the protection of human rights must be visible in all our areas of activity. These make up what might be called our main identity, the hallmark of our common world. These are inherent in the very nature of the Organization. These elements explain why the OSCE has been an extremely positive presence in various countries and crises, why it enjoys worldwide prestige, and why its role in today's international architecture is recognized. And there is still room for the OSCE's specific mandate to be developed to its full potential.

Do you think, however, that the OSCE is still relevant, given that there are other important players?

Of course it's relevant. It's extremely relevant, as we have recently seen in Georgia. There are other examples — Ukraine, Kosovo and the Western Balkans.

At the same time, we are still confronted with several situations where this Organization of 56 States should pursue its clear objective of promoting and guaranteeing peace, security and co-operation through dialogue. The OSCE's work has produced excellent results in many areas and I am sure even more can be achieved in the years to come. For example, as long as OSCE field missions are needed in certain countries, the Organization will have an important role to play.

Those are the strengths. What do you see as the OSCE's weaknesses?

I think we have to preserve a sense of common purpose among participating States so that we can all take pride in being part of the OSCE. We need to develop a higher sense of self-esteem regarding the OSCE's achievements towards helping end the Cold War and our current achievements. We should try to restore the communitarian spirit we once had — the spirit of sharing



the same goals, the spirit of involvement and commitment, and the spirit of respect for everybody's sensitivities and concerns.

At recent meetings of the OSCE Ministerial Council, we were unable to agree on certain texts, and the absence of a final declaration gave rise to a sense of failure. This is strange. We are all part of this Organization. We need to work together and explore every possible way to improve mutual understanding. So, let's put the accent on the positive instead of on creating divisions.

What are Spain's priorities for the year and why?

First of all, there is the traditional OSCE agenda, which will be pursued as usual. The Spanish Chairmanship will be a straightforward one and will focus not only on the implementation of the reform agenda.

Having said that, peace and security and the fight against terrorism will be very high on the Spanish agenda.

On the economic side, we will focus on concerns about the environment, soil and land degradation, and water management. Everybody should be helped to understand that these issues pose a serious threat to our common security.

Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos: "We should try to restore the communitarian spirit we once had."

We also want to focus on the Alliance of Civilizations, an initiative backed by the United Nations. We think it can serve as a good platform for fostering mutual respect in the OSCE area, which reflects a diversity of societies, religions, cultures and histories.

Concerning the human dimension, we would like to keep the three personal representatives on tolerance and non-discrimination. We are in favour of a follow-up conference on anti-Semitism and the struggle against other forms of intolerance, and we are also ready to hold a conference on "Islamophobia", which I feel is important and should be placed on the international agenda.

Is one year enough to achieve these kinds of priorities?

One year is a reasonable span of time within which to develop a coherent programme of activities and to address some difficult issues. For instance, one can engage in a dialogue with parties involved in a particular conflict and representatives of local communities, thus facilitating the task of the OSCE. The role of the Secretariat is vital in this respect, as it ensures continuity and coherence among the successive chairmanships.

What do you think Spain's biggest challenge will be as Chair in 2007?

I think adapting the OSCE to the challenges of the twenty-first century is a great responsibility. It means that we should all work together like a family since we are faced with the same threats and challenges. Therefore, we need a positive agenda that encourages co-operation among participating States, whether it concerns electoral processes, the protection of human rights or safeguarding of the environment. All members of the OSCE should be able to take part in this process on equal terms. Participating States are not classified into different categories and each one should be able to address its concerns in the same manner.

How do you see the role of our Mediterranean Partners?

As I have already mentioned, it is strange to talk about security and co-operation in Europe and not be actively engaged in co-operation with our Mediterranean neighbours. That's complete nonsense. Their status should be reinforced.

After all, where are Europe's main security

threats coming from today? We talk about terrorism, about immigration, about demography, about cultural challenges. So I don't understand why just a few Mediterranean countries are invited [to take part in OSCE activities].

That has to change. We should not forget that the relationship between Mediterranean countries and the OSCE goes back to the beginning: The Helsinki Final Act had a Mediterranean chapter. Right now, however, these Partners have a limited capacity to speak and to make their voices heard.

Of course I don't mean to launch a revolution within the Organization, but we do need to start a new process in which we can strengthen this co-operation so our Mediterranean partners can participate in as many OSCE initiatives as possible for the benefit of the OSCE and regional security.

Since Spain is one of the two co-sponsors of the Alliance of Civilizations, what do you hope to achieve in this area during your Chairmanship?

We would like to promote the development of the Alliance as soon as we assume the OSCE Chairmanship. We should analyze how the OSCE can contribute to this initiative in the light of the findings of the Alliance's High-Level Group. I believe the OSCE is well placed to make a contribution.

What is your view on the number of Spanish staff members in the OSCE, including in the field. Too few, too many?

Well, too few. Spain has the world's eighth largest economy and has been an active participant in OSCE developments from the very beginning. It is unfortunate that we do not have more Spanish nationals working in the OSCE. We really need to be much more present in field missions. Just to give you an example, the first Head of Mission from Spain is Ambassador Jorge Fuentes, who was appointed to the post in Croatia in 2005. Just think of it, after so many years! We are a country with immense experience and talent and yet only 2.1 per cent of the OSCE staff is Spanish. Some improvements are to be expected in this area.

Does Spain encourage secondments as an OSCE mechanism for placing people in certain posts?

Yes, we do encourage secondments, but we need to work and interact more closely with OSCE institutions to address the current low level.

Meet Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos Cuyaubé

Since April 2004: Minister for Foreign Affairs

Since March 2004: Member of the Spanish Parliament

1996-2003: EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process

1996: Ambassador of Spain to Israel

1993-1996: Director-General of Foreign Policy for Africa and the Middle East

1991-1993: Director-General of the Institute for Co-operation with the Arab World

1987-1991: Deputy Director-General for Northern Africa

1984-1987: Political Adviser, Spanish Embassy in Morocco

1979-1984: First Secretary, later chargé d'affaires, Spanish Embassy in Yugoslavia

1974-1979: Director; Head of the Eastern Europe Co-ordination Desk, Foreign Ministry

Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos holds a degree in law and political sciences.