

Speech by
the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, H.E. Solomon Passy,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria
on the Occasion of the Winter Meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE
Vienna, 19th February 2004

Mr President, distinguished members of the Assembly,

Mr President, dear Bruce, thank you very much for your kind words of welcome. I am sure your Assembly will treat me with all the kindness and hospitality with which they treat members of the executive branch who come before them in their national parliaments to explain their respective policies: meaning I am also ready for the grilling Question and Answer-session later.

But please allow me to first express how pleased I am to have been invited here today to your Assembly in order to convey to you my intentions as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. As a former parliamentarian twice elected to the Bulgarian Parliament, being among you today really feels like a homecoming!

FROM ACTION-PLANS AND STRATEGIES TO ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Distinguished delegates, it is my pleasure to set out before you the main priorities of the Bulgarian Chairmanship for 2004. I am grateful to you, Mr President, for your generous words in your address to the OSCE Ministerial Council in Maastricht last December, when you offered the Assembly "not only as a Partner in concrete activities but to enhance our already formidable list of activities working for you".

I can sum up the priorities of this Chairmanship in two simple words: implementation and continuity. By implementation I mean that our full energy and attention will be focused on the implementation of all that we have approved in Maastricht. We were tasked there with a formidable workload. To give you only a few examples: we have to start working on the implementation of the new OSCE Comprehensive Strategy to address Threats to Security and Stability in the 21st Century, get going on the new Economic Strategy, build on the efforts of the previous Chairmanship in the field of anti-trafficking - this includes setting up a special mechanism against trafficking at the Secretariat - and continue with the implementation of all our different commitments in the struggle against the continuing menace of international terrorism.

It is clear that we do not have an easy task before us. I will come back in more detail to the implementation of these and other priorities later. Before I do so, I would like to stress the second word with which I would like to summarize our Chairmanship: continuity. Continuity between the different Chairmanships. The last thing this organization needs is the introduction of new priorities, new strategies, and new initiatives by every new Chairman-in-Office. This Chairmanship will focus on our Maastricht taskings, and build upon the priorities set by the Netherlands in 2003.

So Mr President, members of the Parliamentary Assembly, do not expect a huge number of new policies and initiatives. What you can expect is a Chairmanship that will do its utmost to turn action-plans and strategies into action and implementation. As an old Bulgarian saying goes: "The vineyard needs a hoe, not a prayer".

PRIORITIES OF THE CHAIRMANSHIP IN 2004

NEW THREATS AND TERRORISM

Coming back to our priorities for this year: the Maastricht Ministerial Council produced a number of key Strategies to guide us in the years to come. Implementation must start right away. We will try to use the Second Annual Security Review Conference in 2004 as a stock-taking moment, a way to focus on ways and means of implementing the new OSCE comprehensive Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century.

TERRORISM

The fight against terrorism remains a tremendous challenge. Continued implementation of the OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism, the Bucharest Plan and the Bishkek Programme is necessary.

We have continued to witness horrific terrorist attacks in our own participating States - recently, in Istanbul and only two weeks ago in the sub-way in Moscow - as well as in Iraq and Afghanistan . What is called for are practical robust measures to fight terrorism, to be implemented naturally to a large extent in cooperation with other international agencies. The work of the OSCE in fighting terrorism rarely makes headlines but that does not diminish its importance. With the practical, pragmatic approach that is so characteristic of our Organization, we have concentrated our efforts on concrete areas where we can make a real difference - airport security, policing, combating shoulder-fired missiles, secure travel documents, to name but a few.

TRAFFICKING

In the field of trafficking, no time should be lost in implementing the Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings. The same applies to the Maastricht mechanism. Work should start without delay. Having its own experience in countering trafficking, Bulgaria will promote maximum synergy of multilateral co-operation in this field.

INCREASED CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Mr President,

In view of the scope of the challenges ahead, co-operation with other International Organizations is of the highest importance. The Bulgarian Chairmanship therefore intends to intensify co-operation with the UN, EU, NATO, the Council of Europe and other relevant international agencies. In my view closer interaction particularly with the EU and NATO is of crucial importance to the security, stability and democratic prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic area. During these last weeks the Chair already has held different high-level co-ordination meetings with the EU, the Council of Europe and NATO. On the 23rd of this month, in a few days, in my capacity as Chairman-in-Office, I and my OSCE Troika partners - my Dutch and Slovenian colleagues - will meet with the EU Ministerial Troika.

EDUCATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Education will be one of the priorities of the Bulgarian Chairmanship. Education is of core significance for the efficient implementation of the OSCE mandate. The Bulgarian Chairmanship believes that education has an important role to play in the implementation of a viable and comprehensive concept of security. Our objective is to add more political weight to education as an inherent element of conflict prevention - one of the essentials of our organization. Education and training should remain pivotal in OSCE human rights protection programs and activities. The Chairmanship will strive at mobilizing every resource and effort available to promote education and training activities. Apart from drawing attention to this important subject, the Chair hopes in practical terms to organize specific dedicated events (such as a Ministerial Meeting on Education in Central Asia, a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Human Rights, Education and Training and a seminar on Human Resources Development) and foster the implementation of projects already initiated by the OSCE family of missions and institutions. In this context the Chairmanship will co-ordinate OSCE activities with other specialized international agencies, e.g. the Council of Europe, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, financial institutions, and of course, whenever possible, with bilateral donors.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

Another major challenge we face is the implementation of the Maastricht Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension. Considerable work lies ahead in strengthening good governance, ensuring sustainable economic and social development and protection of the environment, and increasing States' capabilities to address challenges and threats adequately. For successful implementation, active participation of all participating States is required.

COMBATING INTOLERANCE, RACISM, ANTI-SEMITISM

We also need to pursue further OSCE objectives in combating aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia, anti-semitism, and other forms of discrimination. The main focus will fall on preparing the three major forums: in Berlin on anti-Semitism, in Brussels on tolerance and the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination and in Paris on the relationship between racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet and hate crimes. Preparations for the important Berlin conference on anti-Semitism are fully underway. The conference will be held on 28 and 29 April, and will be aimed at all measures necessary to counter anti-Semitism: mainly measures in the field of education and rule of law.

INTERNAL REFORM

Mr President, before I address some of the regional issues this organization is faced with, one more issue calls for due attention by our chairmanship: internal reform.

In general we have to address the challenge: how to make the OSCE more attractive, better known and more effective. At the same time we have to explore ways to make the organization more flexible and operational while facing the need to take a rapid decision.

REGIONAL ISSUES

Several regional OSCE issues remain unsolved today and form a continued challenge. But progress is being made in several fields.

GEORGIA

In my capacity as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, I was extremely pleased to witness the recent inauguration of the new President of Georgia Mr. Mikheil Saakashvili on the 25th of January. During this visit I had also the pleasure to meet Mrs. Nino Burjanadze, Vice-President of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and had a very constructive and useful talk with her on a wide range of OSCE matters. As I said after my visit to Georgia, we endorse the work of the International Election Observation Mission and believe that the forthcoming parliamentary elections are another essential step towards the development of democracy in Georgia. But a lot of work remains to be done. We in the OSCE have to examine whether we can expand our support to the election processes, also from a longer-term perspective. The Parliamentary Assembly clearly has played an essential role in the democratic development of Georgia and will continue to do so. In this context I am very pleased that you, President George, have again agreed to lead the coming OSCE short-term election monitoring mission in Georgia. Mr President, I thank you for that and I commend you for all that you contribute in your capacity as President of this Assembly to the democratic development of Georgia.

I wish to stress in this connection the importance of the territorial integrity and national unity of Georgia as a prerequisite for the improvement of the overall climate in the volatile region of southern Caucasus.

MOLDOVA

With regard to finding a solution for resolving the Transdniestrian conflict I am very pleased to be able to share with you the news that at a recent meeting of the official mediators in Sofia in January, it was decided that the mediators, the Republic of Moldova and the representatives of Transdniestria within the five-sided format will continue to work on a formula for a constitutional arrangement that would meet the expectations and win the support of the overwhelming majority of Moldovans. We must continue our search for a comprehensive settlement. The status-quo is not an option.

Meanwhile, we expect that the withdrawal of the ammunition and equipment from Transdniestria will continue and the implementation of the Istanbul commitments will be completed without further delay.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

As regards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I should state that there needs to be progress on this issue as well. During a recent meeting with the Minsk-Group of the OSCE, the Chair welcomed the recent activities of the Minsk-Group Co-Chairmen aimed at re-establishing direct dialogue between the parties, at all levels. We intend to give further support to the Minsk process in all ways we can. To underline the importance I attach to bringing a permanent settlement closer, I intend to visit the Caucasus, hopefully next month.

CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia is an important region for intensive OSCE work. I am therefore pleased to be able to announce that former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari has agreed to continue his work as Personal Envoy of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office for the OSCE Central-Asian countries. Moreover, I am planning to visit the five Central-Asian countries myself this year, hopefully in April.

SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

The Chair considers it important to continue OSCE field activities in South Eastern Europe - still the main focus of OSCE field work - in order to ensure comprehensive implementation of the assigned mandates. The CiO will take due account of processes targeted at future membership in Euro-Atlantic structures and their implications across the broad spectrum of OSCE activities.

PARTNERS

Co-operation with our Asian and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation will also be high on our agenda. In this regard, we welcome Slovenia in the OSCE Troika and look forward to its active role in chairing the Contact group with the Mediterranean partners, thereby building upon the work started in Aqaba. We would also need to explore additional ways to share OSCE norms and commitments to the adjacent areas.

WORKING WITH THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Mr. President,

Fulfilling all of these tasks and challenges will not be easy. Many challenges will confront us in the year ahead. That's why it is important that the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly work together on as broad a front as possible. Obvious examples are the existing excellent cooperation in the field of observing and monitoring elections, like the upcoming elections in Georgia: other co-operation is possible. From our side, the Bulgarian Chairmanship intends to further promote the mutual political support between the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly, which considerably strengthened its role as an important OSCE institution under the able leadership of its President, my friend of over ten years, the Honourable Bruce George.

Mr. President, I know I could not address all the outstanding issues, but I will be happy to answer any questions the members of the Assembly would like to pose.

Thank you for your attention.