



Geneva, 21 January 2008. Victor-Yves Ghebali's favourite walking path was along Lake Geneva, a few steps away from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. Photo: Patrick Martin

APPRECIATION

Victor-Yves Ghebali, “Mr. OSCE” 1942-2009

Victor-Yves Ghebali was an eminent scholar of the United Nations system, the OSCE and international politics in general. He was an outstanding pedagogue and teacher who made his views known through the media.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt, Victor-Yves came to the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva (HEI) in the early 1960s to complete his studies, working with Professors Jean Siotis and Georges Abi-Saab and completing his thesis at the University of Grenoble. He worked for the European Centre of the Carnegie Foundation in Geneva for several years. In the 1970s, he started teaching at the Graduate Institute and was nominated to the Chair of International Organizations in 1990.

Daniel Warner, Director, Centre for International Governance, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva (HEI)

Although much of his scholarly work focused on the League of Nations and the United Nations system, he was one of the first scholars interested in the Helsinki Process, which became the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and, eventually, the OSCE.

An indefatigable worker, Professor Ghebali was driven by his passion for knowledge, communication and justice. He leaves a huge volume of work testifying to his academic excellence and wide interests, a large public appreciative of his clear and concise explanations of current events, and — in addition to his loving family — friends throughout the world who will remember a most sensitive individual and a loyal and devoted friend.

“The OSCE has lost a great friend, one whose eyes were always wide open and always among the most perceptive. We shall all be the poorer for no longer being able to rely on his insights.” Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, Secretary General of the OSCE, echoed the reaction of many in the OSCE community upon hearing of the death of Professor Victor-Yves Ghebali on 6 January, a month before he would have turned 67. “His sharp and always constructive intelligence, his passion for the details that count and his great sense of justice, quite apart from his academic excellence, testified to his strong commitment to the institutions for security co-operation in Europe,” said the Secretary General. The OSCE Magazine invited some of Professor Ghebali’s friends and former associates to reflect on his contribution.

Professor Ghebali was Mr. OSCE. His unparalleled memory, understanding and analysis of the Organization’s evolution, mechanisms, institutions and decisions made him a walking encyclopaedia of knowledge that was tapped by officials and researchers alike.

He did not hoard this knowledge, he shared it — with his students and through publications and Swiss-funded initiatives such as the “OSCE Cluster of Competence” that met every year on the shores of Lake Geneva to discuss current issues (and eat well at *La Perle du Lac*).

He was, by turns, one of the OSCE’s harshest critics and one of its biggest fans. With his passing, the Organization has lost its conscience and a significant piece of its memory.

Walter Kemp, OSCE staff member from 1996 to 2006

In French-speaking Switzerland, anyone with an interest in international politics has benefited, at one time or another, from Professor Ghebali's enlightening analytical views. "He was a born teacher," recalled his former colleague and friend, Daniel Warner.

He did not confine his lectures to the many students and diplomats who had been signing up for his courses since the 1970s. He considered it his duty as a "public intellectual" to reach out to as many people as possible, particularly through the media. Professor Ghebali was one of the first to understand that the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which had been building bridges between East and West since 1973, portended a new era in the Old World.

He was to follow this entire process, which would contribute to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and would witness the transformation of the CSCE into the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. He owed his title "Mr. OSCE" to his unparalleled knowledge of the Organization. It was this knowledge that was to lead Federal Councillor Flavio Cotti to appoint him as an adviser in 1996, when Switzerland assumed the chairmanship of the OSCE.

Anne Kauffmann, a Swiss journalist, is the editor-in-chief of the website www.hommages.ch.

(Portions of this tribute appeared on the website of the Center for European Integration Strategies, a think tank dedicated to EU integration processes and the Western Balkans.)

A Ghebali sampler

La diplomatie de la détente. La CSCE, d'Helsinki à Vienne (1973-1989), Bruylant (ed.), Bruxelles, 1989

L'OSCE dans l'Europe post-communiste 1990-1996: Vers une identité paneuropéenne de sécurité, Bruylant (ed.), Bruxelles, 1996

The OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security: Anatomy and Implementation, with Alexandre Lambert, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Leiden, 2005

Democratic Governance of the Security Sector beyond the OSCE Area: Regional Approaches in Africa and the Americas, co-edited with Alexandre Lambert, DCAF (LIT), Geneva/Zurich/Vienna, 2007



To mark the retirement of Prof. Victor-Yves Ghebali, the Graduate Institute of International Studies published a bibliography of his writings, which lists 244 entries:

Conflicts, sécurité et coopération; Conflicts, security and co-operation, Liber amicorum, Victor-Yves Ghebali; Chetail, Vincent (ed.), Bruylant, Brussels, 2007, pp. 569-588

On several occasions, both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, I had the pleasure and the privilege of interviewing Professor Ghebali. He was a political journalist's dream — always welcoming and willing to share his knowledge. The OSCE was, for him, more than just another international organization.

He had the rare capacity to explain clearly the profound and irresistible movement towards a European "re-union", a subject that was hidden under so many committees and "baskets", making it sound rather technical and boring even to those who were interested in foreign policy (and who were used to showier summits).

"An interview about the OSCE? I'm not sure this will interest our readers," newspaper editors would tell me. But, in the end, Victor-Yves Ghebali's enthusiasm would win them over.

Professor Ghebali retired in June 2007. On that occasion, the Graduate Institute published a bibliography of his works and organized a special day in his honour, to which specialists and politicians from around the world were invited. Despite his deteriorating health, he continued to write, give lectures and struggle valiantly against his illness.

Except for a few brief periods in the 1970s and 1990s when the CSCE and the OSCE caught the world's attention, there has been little scholarly interest in the Organization — either to the East or to the West of Vienna. Victor-Yves Ghebali made up for that unfortunate neglect.

He was one of the few serious researchers who set out to study and observe the OSCE and record its evolution. His long-standing research on multilateral organizations and the United Nations, and his interest in East-West relations, led him to look more closely at the CSCE in the 1980s.

From the outset, his approach was marked by comprehensiveness: Starting with studies on the military aspects of security in relation to the CSCE, he soon published a voluminous book on the CSCE covering the period from 1973 to 1989. Prolific and indefatigable, he based his studies and judgment on evidence that he gathered from numerous sources — from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

He followed the transformative years when the Conference evolved into an Organization, writing the definitive book on the subject, *L'OSCE dans l'Europe post-communiste 1990-1996*.

With his profound insight into OSCE developments, Professor Ghebali carried out research and published on matters covering all the dimensions of the OSCE. His students were not the only ones who appreciated his experience and expertise. In spite of a busy schedule, he also made himself available to governments, international organizations and the media, which sought his friendly, sober, solid and balanced advice, and also his co-operation.

During particularly challenging times for the OSCE, Switzerland, which had played a key role among the "neutral and non-aligned" countries during the period of East-West confrontation, encouraged and supported his OSCE research within the Graduate Institute of International Studies. This made it possible for Professor Ghebali to contribute to making Geneva a place for continuing, vivid and constructive discussions on the OSCE.

The OSCE has lost a source of knowledge and reliable advice. But many more will miss him as a friend.

William Hoeynck, first Secretary General of the CSCE/OSCE (1993 to 1996)
