



**OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION**

*The Head of Mission*

**Remarks by Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, Head of OSCE Mission to Serbia, at the opening of the academic conference “From Helsinki to Belgrade: The First CSCE Follow-up Meeting in Belgrade 1977/78”**

**Sava Center, Belgrade, 8 March 2008**

Excellencies, Conference participants, dear guests

Assistant Minister Starcevic,

Professor Dahlmann,

Ambassador Reimaa,

Mr. Kovacevic,

I am happy to join in the opening of this academic conference convened on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the conclusion of the first CSCE Follow-up in Belgrade. The conference is organized by the OSCE Mission and our partner Zikic Foundation, which initiated the idea. It was made possible by the generous support of the Finish Government, for which we are grateful. We also warmly thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia for their support.

In a few months, the arena not far from here and the city of Belgrade will be a center of Europe – I am referring to the Eurovision song contest.

Thirty years ago, this same city and the country, at that time former Yugoslav federation of six republics, and this hall, just built, were also a center of a European contest, but a political one – a contest over the implementation of Final Act of Helsinki, with a dominating and at that time still disputable issue of human rights.

In a divided Europe of the time, human rights, as a legitimate issue of international debate, were contested by one side of the divided continent.

Due to this contest, which resulted in a diplomatic stalemate, the first Belgrade Follow-up meeting ended with a modest, but nonetheless important result - with a

brief concluding document that ensured the continuity of the CSCE process in all its three dimensions, enshrined in the Final act of Helsinki.

At that time the CSCE was still a fragile and institutionally undeveloped process, but it was almost the only channel of multilateral dialogue among the participating States, whose importance was especially appreciated by smaller and neutral and nonaligned countries, which persevered at the Belgrade Meeting, with a number of other like-minded countries, to keep the process alive.

After the 1975 Helsinki Summit, which laid down the foundations of the CSCE, the 1977 Belgrade Meeting kept the door open for its further strengthening and development.

Admittedly, even after Belgrade, the road to a new, less divided Europe and to the universal acceptance of common CSCE values often looked rather precarious and full of obstacles; but the path, though narrow, was there and courageous politicians and human rights activists had the determination to persist.

This journey, at times treacherous and uncertain, took almost a quarter of a century and resulted in 1990 in a new CSCE document “Charter of Paris for a new Europe”, complementing the Final Act of Helsinki.

Over these past three decades, the OSCE has established itself, in addition to the European Union and the Council of Europe, as the third most important regional organization in this part of the world.

While the CSCE benefited itself from the ending of Cold War divide, it was also a catalyst of this change and promoter of democratic evolution and respect for human and minority rights.

CSCE and later OSCE adapted itself to a new concept of security, which emerged after the collapse of a bi-polar bloc structure, based on the balance of military power of potential state adversaries.

The focus has shifted gradually, but irreversibly, to the security of an individual and his or her well being. While the security of a state remains important, especially in the face of new non-state security threats, it can not and should not have predominance over the security of its citizens. This has been one of the messages that emanated, may be not explicitly, but certainly implicitly, from the deliberations at the Belgrade CSCE meeting way back in 1977/78.

Perceived by many as a “human rights conference”, and rightly so, the CSCE approach to security and cooperation became more complex and developed over time. While at the beginning it was mainly a norm-setter, the OSCE evolved into a security provider and a tool in institution building, especially through practical activities of the Missions in the field.

The OSCE has been almost from its beginning an instrument of cooperative security and a predecessor to the concept of human security. Its political and military dimensions were complemented by the unwavering attention to the rights of

individuals. The balance of the three “baskets” (security, economic, humanitarian) has remained the trademark of the OSCE/CSCE until today.

Unlike most of the European continent, after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the region of Western Balkans, in particular countries of former Yugoslavia, have passed through a period of instability and conflict that lasted almost a decade.

Therefore, the OSCE approach to the enhancement of security in the region of South-East Europe gained two additional facets - conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation. While these elements remain important, we have now passed, I believe, beyond the point of conflict management. The reform agenda in the region is increasingly focused on achieving high standards in building democratic institutions and promoting rule of law and human and minority rights protection.

Despite nearly two decades of turmoil in the region, I am confident that this part of Europe and this city have a potential to re-establish themselves, as they were perceived thirty years ago, into an area of enduring stability, dialogue and cooperation.

A few weeks ago, I delivered my yearly report to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna reaffirming that our Mission is continuing to work closely with Serbian authorities and civil society to further the country’s democratic reforms. We are making steps to encourage as much as possible the national ownership of reforms in all crucial areas. We see and feel positive response from the country’s citizens, as well as from state institutions. In the complex agenda that Serbia’s society still faces, the OSCE remains ready to provide a professional, committed and timely response to help advance Serbia’s reform agenda .

In conclusion, I would like to wish the distinguished participants of the scientific conference a thorough and productive debate on different aspects of the Belgrade CSCE Follow-up Meeting. I believe that the Belgrade Meeting and the early days of the CSCE merit a committed historical research and a reassessment from a distance of thirty years. This will no doubt lead to new insights, and I sincerely hope that the conference debate and outcome will stimulate a growing and positive interest in the OSCE theme as a whole, attracting particularly attention of the new generations of students and academics. After all, academic research is not just for its own sake, but to enhance knowledge and promote certain values through a dialogue which can be polemical, but honest and tolerant. Indeed, it is the OSCE itself which stands for dialogue and tolerance, and its results and achievements should be always measured against these standards. With that, I wish you two successful and pleasant days in Belgrade.