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CLOSING STATEMENT

by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office Dr Dimitrij Rupel
at the 13th OSCE Ministerial Council
Ljubljana, 5 December 2005

“Looking Ahead”

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,
Excellencies!

Two long days and nights of interesting statements and tough negotiations are behind us. We have reaffirmed our commitments, underlined the relevance of the OSCE, and taken steps to strengthen its effectiveness.

The OSCE is at the same time a practical organization and an organization of values and principles. It is our common values which unite us and our common commitments which make a difference to those who have entrusted us with this job. As I get ready to complete my term as Chairman-in-office, I wish to share with you a few of my own impressions of this past year.

The OSCE remains a vital organization in many respects, and one which will continue to stand as a beacon of hope for those living in desperate political and social conditions. From Vancouver to Vladivostok, our citizens turn to the OSCE for answers; in some cases this is their preferred address or their only address.

Friends, we will only remain relevant if we can continue to help our citizens help themselves.

Whenever I traveled as the Chairman-in-office, in addition to my official contacts, I also made sure to listen to the NGOs, to opposition groups, and to civil society. I don't see how we can continue building and strengthening our pluralistic and democratic institutions, if we do not take the time to nurture the fundamental elements of a democratic society.

I was surprised how similar their (NGO's) accounts and demands were—but most of all, they wanted to be heard. The OSCE listens and will listen to them; in Slovenia, in the United States, in the Russian Federation, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and in Tajikistan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As both my President and Prime Minister said in their remarks to this Ministerial Council yesterday, we must broaden the zone of human security. Expanding this zone is our common obligation and highest priority. Democratic capital and economic prosperity will come on the backbone of human security. I would say there is a direct correlation between an individual's perception of security and their innovative drive.

This year, I saw some progress in many countries in terms of leaders genuinely working to find ways to increase human security. Other instances were far less encouraging. I remain worried about the back-pedaling on reforms in Uzbekistan. We should as soon as possible find ways to work with our Uzbek partners to narrow the divide which currently stands between us. The OSCE remains a vital channel of communication.

There is no excuse for systematic failure to live up to the responsibilities to which we've committed ourselves. OSCE participation cannot be a free ride. It's above all an effort at sharing responsibilities and commitments. Tolerating grave breaches undermines the credibility of the OSCE in the eyes of those who count on us most—namely, our citizens. If we lose their ear and their trust, I am afraid, we've lost our cause and purpose.

For example, it is unfortunate that after six years we are still debating the 1999 Istanbul commitments on withdrawal of Russian forces from Moldova.

Colleagues,

Southeastern Europe has been a high priority for me as Chairman-in-Office. This region is a primary example of why this organization continues to hold added value. The status of Kosovo will have to be resolved—the sooner the better. The OSCE should continue its long-term engagement in Kosovo, building on its recognized expertise in the field of institution-and-democracy-building, human rights and the rule of law, and taking advantage of its extensive field presence in order to assist in all efforts aimed at developing a multi-ethnic and tolerant society.

We should give the negotiations process a real chance. I also urge you to consider Serbia's future, not just Kosovo. Serbia needs a clear European perspective.

The role of the OSCE in the Western Balkans will remain important. There are different needs, and we should acknowledge that this region is no longer homogeneous. Croatia is well on its way to the EU; Macedonia will soon follow. The risks and priorities are different for the international community, and not least, for the OSCE.

Next year, the OSCE may have to monitor Montenegro's referendum on independence. The responsibility is enormous, as much will depend on the assessment.

Dear friends,

In 2005 we revived the OSCE. Our debate has been open, frank, and I think positive. We are bridging important divides between positions, and we're handing over the leadership of this Organization to our Belgian friends in good shape.

We have agreed on a roadmap for reform, which is extremely important for the future of this Organization, we have new scales of contribution and a capable Secretary General in place. This is all good news.

Next year we will have a real opportunity to capitalize on the groundwork made this year in Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, and in Georgia. I strongly urge the government of Kyrgyzstan to expedite the Constitutional reform. This was a promise made to the Kyrgyz people, and in many ways, is a cornerstone of lasting stability.

There will be a number of key elections in the OSCE area next year. Elections are the litmus test of democracy. The electorate needs to feel assured that it has a voice in a fair and representative process that reflects the will of the people. The OSCE has a well deserved reputation of election expertise, and this needs to be preserved and enhanced if possible.

But elections are only part of a democratic process.

Azerbaijan stands at the doorstep of a new era, and I truly hope to see it succeed. For this reason, political stability is important. The election fell short of some OSCE standards, and the government must act to quickly redress these shortcomings. At the same time, I'm convinced that the best way forward at this point is through dialogue between the government and the opposition.

A stable Azerbaijan also offers a real opportunity for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict. I'm convinced that we are on the verge of a solution, and Slovenia stands ready to contribute its fair share as a facilitator of dialogue; even after our Chairmanship. Armenia and Slovenia have good relations, which was not only confirmed through our excellent work within the OSCE, but also by the recent visit of the Armenian President to Slovenia.

It is important for us to continue moving forward in finding a lasting settlement. Stalling on the negotiations goes contrary to regional stability and the interests of the two South Caucasus states. Future prosperity in Georgia and progress in South Ossetia will depend, to an extent, also on the broader stability in the South Caucasus. I urge my Belgian colleague to continue working on strengthening the dialogue in the region, particularly between Tbilisi and Tskinali.

Esteemed colleagues,

The Ljubljana Ministerial Summit has given us a fresh perspective. We have all to gain by strengthening our cooperation with institutions like NATO and the EU, and various NGOs. We can double our efforts this way, and save on resources. This year has offered us a unique opportunity to draw inspiration from the past in order to invigorate and inspire our efforts for the future.

Let us go forward together in a spirit of solidarity and partnership to improve our collective security through co-operation. Let us strengthen dialogue between civilizations.

I now pass the Chairmanship torch to my colleague Karel De Gucht. Be careful Karel, there is fire in this torch.

Seriously though, I offer you my full support, and know that you will also be ably assisted by our new Troika colleague Spain. My congratulations also to Finland for the decision that has endorsed their Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2008.

Colleagues – all of you – thank you for your support this year. I believe that overall we have had a good Ministerial and a good year. Let us now look to the future.

Slovenia bids you farewell and a safe journey home!

Thank you!