

Bruce George, MP
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Address to the Plenary Sitting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the
Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 27 January 2003

Mr. President,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me, as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, to address this plenary sitting of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. I thank you, Mr. President, for the initiative to invite me to share with you the views and activities of the OSCE Assembly.

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly as the first European assembly to be created in the history of our continent, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly as the youngest international parliamentary institution in Europe, have been productive and successful towards the achievement of our common objectives and goals.

Today, more than ever, the OSCE and the Council of Europe need to continue working together to ensure democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in all our countries. We must not forget that we are important and indispensable

organisations in this regard, providing the democratic foundations of the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

Our two Organisations, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, have played an essential role in the transformation of Europe. There still is enormous amount of work for both of us to do in the field of creating peace, security and the implementation of the European standards of democracy and human rights. Sometimes – not always – our activities overlap. In such cases co-ordination and sometimes also co-operation is needed. But there, certainly, is a lot of work to do for both of us, and our Parliamentary Assemblies.

Building European security, in a comprehensive way, and preventing conflict is a challenge both for the OSCE and for the Council of Europe - and it is a challenge that can best be faced by both organisations working together and maximising our respective areas of competence and comparative advantage. Likewise at the parliamentary level - and I am pleased that our two Assemblies have established a close relationship and an effective and mutually reinforcing division of labour. The fact that the governmental and parliamentary leaderships of the OSCE and the Council of Europe have met regularly to co-ordinate their activities and to discuss matters of mutual concern is of paramount importance in that respect.

The parliamentary dimension of the OSCE is essential, especially as the OSCE has become an important partner to the Council of Europe in furthering peace and stability across Europe. The OSCE remains the most flexible and responsive Euro-Atlantic foreign policy instrument for non-military contingencies. It is the primary instrument for early

warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation in its region. It has the capacity to deal with both intra-state conflict and trans-national threats to stability. Its broad Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian composition and its comprehensive approach to security are a unique asset asset to our Organisation.

We must continue working to enhance both our coordination and cooperation. Particularly in those fields related to the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and election monitoring.

Mr. President,

Before analysing the prospects for our cooperation, allow me briefly to present the distinguished members of your Assembly with some of our activities in the past months.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly continues to address major issues of concern to the citizens of the OSCE while promoting parliamentary involvement in the activities of the Organisation, facilitating inter-parliamentary dialogue and co-operation and providing a vital link between the governmental side of the OSCE and the directly-elected representatives of the peoples of the OSCE participating States.

NATO and the European Union are in the process of enlarging. The outcome of the Prague Summit last November and the conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council will have far-reaching consequences not only for the shape of Europe, but also for the nature of the transatlantic partnership. The enlargement of both organisations will

extend even further the already large common space of democratic stability on the European continent.

The OSCE, as the only pan-European and Euro-Atlantic security Organisation, has a crucial and unique role to play in enhancing overall security within and among states. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has decided to devote the 2003 Rotterdam Annual Session precisely to this theme: “*The Role of the OSCE in the new architecture of Europe*”, under which we intend to address from our perspective the issues related to the enlargement of NATO and the EU. The OSCE, along with NATO, the EU and other transatlantic and European institutions, must develop its commitment to realizing the vision of an Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian community of values, without artificial and hostile dividing lines, where all members feel secure.

Furthermore, the ad hoc committees of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly continue to serve as an important tool in furthering the development of democracy and stability in the OSCE region. The ad hoc Committees on Belarus, on Moldova, on Kosovo, and the ad hoc Committee on Abkhazia, have contributed to prompting dialogue and seeking co-operation in politically unstable areas. The Committees have promoted, in such areas, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and assistance in the development of the legal and democratic institutions and processes by providing advice to the parties in conflict on legal, constitutional, and political frameworks.

The Parliamentary Assembly also continues to pay special importance to the relations between the OSCE and its Mediterranean and Asian Partners. The Conference on Security in the Mediterranean held in

Madrid last October and the Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum to be held in Almaty next year clearly show our commitment. These Conferences seek to bring regional issues and concerns – in this case those of the Eurasian and Mediterranean dimensions of the OSCE - to the attention of a greater number of parliamentarians throughout the OSCE area. The events and aftermath of 11 September 2001 have highlighted both the importance of security in Asia and in the Mediterranean to security in the OSCE area as a whole as well as the need for increased dialogue among OSCE member governments and parliaments with our Partners.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly pays special attention to the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE. I should note that the Assembly will be holding its Third Sub-Regional Economic Conference devoted to the promotion of Small and Medium-sized enterprises in Bern next May. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has also paid special attention to the issue of Gender equality in the OSCE. We are proud to have also initiated this debate in the OSCE family and we will continue to make every effort for increasing the attention of the OSCE to important gender issues at every level of our Organisation.

Mr. President,

Distinguished colleagues,

Allow me to briefly reflect on some of the political issues that our Assembly is currently addressing, and in which both of our Assemblies should continue to join efforts and enhance co-operation.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has continued to develop a particularly active programme for monitoring parliamentary elections.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has taken the political lead in monitoring parliamentary and presidential elections in the OSCE area for over a decade. We successfully cooperate with the ODIHR.

Mr. President,

Election monitoring is one of the areas where our two Assemblies have developed co-ordination and cooperation. Others, the European Parliament in particular, have also been included in this cooperation. This is an area where our joint efforts will be needed for several years to come.

Election monitoring requires cooperation on several levels. Each election monitoring operation should be a long process in each individual country. They are not something where you have omniscient schoolmasters as monitors and ignorant pupils as those whose elections are monitored. Our election monitoring is a form of parliamentary solidarity. Consolidation of parliamentary democracy throughout Europe, and beyond, is in our common interest. It also consolidates peace, stability and prosperity.

Election monitoring can be successful only when those new democracies, whose elections are monitored, cooperate in good faith. With very few exceptions this has been the case. Unfortunately there have also been examples of lack of sufficient cooperation. In this conjunction I want to mention the present government of Belarus.

Mr. President, some time ago I received from you a letter where you suggested that we more formally agree on cooperation in election

monitoring in a form of a memorandum of understanding. You presented this proposal both to me and to the President of the European Parliament. I thank you for this initiative and I fully agree. I do not feel that we need any long and detailed documents. But a memorandum of understanding could codify what has been found good in our cooperation. We should, first of all, agree to cooperate in order to make the work more effective. If important institutions of the international community would speak with several voices, the effect would be weaker and even confusing. When we speak with one voice, we are clear, strong and effective. It would also be useful to define how we work with other institutions, such as the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which does a lot of important work on this field and has been most helpful to parliamentary observers. The memorandum of understanding should in no way limit anybody's possibilities to work. It should make the international cooperation in election monitoring more effective and result oriented. We should also agree to continue cooperating in logistics in order not to waste time and money.

I would also suggest that in the memorandum we agree on following up the election monitoring findings in close cooperation with the parliaments and governments of the countries concerned. Follow up needs to be emphasized. Election monitoring reports must not be filed only. They must also be implemented – in consultation and cooperation.

Our co-operation within the framework of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe has also proven successful. The Parliamentary Troika on the Stability Pact has marked the establishment of genuine institutional parliamentary links between the Stability Pact, international

parliamentary institutions and national parliaments in participating countries. The fact that we are now included in the works of all three Stability Pact Working Tables and of the Regional Table is very positive. The Parliamentary conference held in Brussels, Bucharest and Tirana have proven successful in involving parliamentarians on concrete initiatives capable of enhancing economic growth and regional co-operation in the region.

Mr. President,

Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE – and co-operation therefore between our two Parliamentary Assemblies- is essential for the sake of peace and stability on our continent. The established practice of the (2+2 / 3+3) meetings comprising the governmental and parliamentary dimensions of our two organisations – both at the political and administrative levels - have proven, I believe, a fruitful exercise in identifying policies and uniting efforts towards common goals. In places like Belarus, FYR of Macedonia, the Caucasus, our joint efforts are very much needed.

With regard to Belarus, in which our two Assemblies have had considerable co-operation, there is some small cause for cautious optimism in the recent agreement between the OSCE and the government of Belarus on the new OSCE Office in Minsk, which should begin its work in the coming weeks. However, we should not forget that this breakthrough came only after a stalemate of more than one year during which the work of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group slowly ground to a halt as its international staff were one-by-one denied visas and diplomatic accreditation and forced to leave the country. I can only

hope that the Belarusian authorities will not impede the work of this new Office, but rather cooperate in deepening the democratisation process.

We should also recall the four benchmarks outlined by our parliamentary institutions. Unfortunately, little if any progress has been visible in these areas; in fact we can cite some negative trends in the fact that journalists have been imprisoned and opposition party representatives have been denied access to election commissions in the run-up to the upcoming local elections in March. It is important that we maintain the dialogue between our two Assemblies so as to send the Belarusian authorities a firm and common message on the need to undertake meaningful steps toward democratisation, political pluralism, and respect for human rights, and the rule of law.

I am sure you are all well aware that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has another concern, namely the lack of representation of Belarus in our Assembly. While our political priorities are very close, the technical rules guiding our Assemblies do differ slightly. However, I do not wish to speculate further on this point at this time. Any decision to seat the Delegation of the Belarusian National Assembly will be taken not by me personally, but by the Standing Committee on February 20 and only after a visit of our Working Group on Belarus, which intends to travel to Minsk from 5-7 February.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by thanking you once again for this invitation to present here to our colleagues the activities and objectives of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We are determined to continue to develop

relations and co-operation with you. We have had very positive experience from such co-operation in the past by the “parliamentary troikas” in Albania and Belarus and many election-monitoring projects. It appears essential to join forces between us, particularly in cases where the international community needs to speak with one voice. We look very much forward to our joint activities in the future.

Mr. President I can assure you that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will continue to do its best in assisting you in strengthening respect for and implementation of commitments to democracy, human rights, religious freedom, the rule of law and responsible economic and environmental policies. In other words, furthering peace and stability across Europe.

Thank you very much for your attention.