



INTERVIEW WITH THE SECRETARY GENERAL

## The OSCE: Still tested as a toolkit for troubled times

Marc Perrin de Brichambaut places great emphasis on the OSCE's continued relevance as a toolkit for troubled times, but he knows that tests lie ahead. In an interview with OSCE Spokesperson Martin Nesirky and Senior Adviser Dov Lynch, the Secretary General spelled out his concern about frozen conflicts heating up again and outlined the achievements of the Organization and the challenges it is facing.

August 2005, northern Kosovo: Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut listens to the concerns of Kosovo-Serb residents of the village of Svinjare/Frashër, which was destroyed during the outbreak of violence in March 2004 and has now been rebuilt. Photo: OMIK/Hasan Sopa

**Why is the OSCE still relevant in a changing world? Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut:** Ideally, international organizations should fulfil a task and once they have done so, move along. There is still an enormous amount to be done in the OSCE within the very broad mandate it has received from participating States. This is certainly true in terms of what the initial function of the OSCE was: a forum for security.

Unfortunately, we have not mastered all the crises. In fact, we may be moving towards a resurgence of some of them, especially in terms of the second wave of OSCE activities: helping to promote a transition towards a broad array of values recognized in the Paris Charter [see page 6]. Clearly, there is still a lot to be done there. We have field operations precisely to address the requests of participating States; our field activities are perpetually being reviewed by our hosts, by donor countries and by other concerned States. This is working. We have a lot on our plate.

And of course having an organization based on permanent debate and the elaboration of a set of basic values in a complex and mobile world is very useful. We carry out our mission in a way that is quite unique among international organizations: we serve as a place where three continents meet and continuously discuss the impact of values on security and society as well as trends in international relations. This makes the OSCE truly relevant for the 21st century. **How would you describe the distilled essence of the OSCE? What is its mission statement?**

The OSCE exists to provide participating States with security in all its dimensions through continuous co-operation and debate

**Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, 20 November 1990.** The signatories of the Charter of Paris are honoured at a dinner by their French hosts.



**The Charter of Paris for a New Europe**, a landmark in the Helsinki Process, was signed by 34 Heads of State and Government on 21 November 1990 at a three-day summit of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), the OSCE's forerunner.

The Charter represented the first multilateral instrument to take stock of the end of the cold war and the opening of a new era. The signatories reaffirmed their commitment to the principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the founding document of the CSCE/OSCE.

"The era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended," the participants proclaimed. "We declare that, henceforth, our relations will be founded on respect and co-operation. Europe is liberating itself from the legacy of the past. The courage of men and women, the strength of the will of the peoples and the power of the ideas of the Helsinki Final Act have opened a new era of democracy, peace and unity in Europe."

It continued: "Ours is a time for fulfilling the hopes and expectations our peoples have cherished for decades: steadfast commitment to democracy based on human rights and fundamental freedoms; prosperity through economic liberty and social justice; and equal security for all our countries."

The Charter of Paris heralded the beginning of the transformation of the CSCE into the OSCE, with the establishment of a Secretariat, an Office for Free Elections in Warsaw (later to become the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, or ODIHR) and a Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna. It also created the Summits, the annual Ministerial Councils, the Council of Senior Officials (later replaced by the Permanent Council) and the Parliamentary Assembly.

about shared values. I think this would be the core message. It's a very demanding one and, therefore, one that has to be promoted, explained and discussed for it to be understood.

**How could the OSCE better explain what it does?**

We have to work with our participating States because they have a primary responsibility as stakeholders in the Organization's ambitions.

We are also — and this is something special about the OSCE — continuously working with all sectors of civil society. Civil society is business, media, political parties, non-governmental organizations. Civil society plays a vibrant role in today's world: witness the use of the Internet in all aspects of our lives. We have to be able to address our outreach activities to all branches. Wherever there is a debate about values, or about security, we should be able to make a contribution.

Naturally, we are not alone. We will act as part of a network. We will act where we can bring in some expertise as a niche player, and we will act by adding an innovative element.

**Where would you place the OSCE in the context of international relations at the start of the 21st century?**

International relations are obviously at an interesting juncture. There are trends that may be pointing towards increasing unpredictability, divergence, and a need for global society to reorganize itself and find new modes of governance and co-operation.

The OSCE is fairly well suited to such a fluid phase because it is an open forum where everybody is on an equal footing, where there is a great variety of backgrounds, and where people are used to talking to each other and listening to each other.

This is true not only in the Permanent Council, where there are ambassadors, but also in dozens of meetings organized by the OSCE in all spheres of life, seemingly at every moment throughout the year. It is often the only organization involved in certain issues. Take some of the aspects of combating trafficking in human beings. Take co-operation in the field of police modernization. These OSCE activities are highly relevant to international affairs.

**What has been the OSCE's most important achievement since you became Secretary General?**

I have been fortunate because in the last year or so, we have had a sort of sunny spell. We have been fortunate to have been able to move forward in our reform efforts and in creating more common approaches among participating States.

By and large, it has been a positive period of consolidation. We have had a few success stories — the process of Montenegrin independence, the very good outcome of elections in many countries, and the hard work done by our field operations in building up institutions wherever we are present — and we are now in 19 different places.

But the weather can change. After the sun there may be rain. I am concerned about the current tension between Russia and Georgia.

**What do you see as the OSCE's main priorities up to the end of this year and into 2007?**

Because there are centrifugal forces at work within the OSCE, keeping the Organization together is in itself always an important objective to bear in mind. In the coming months, there will be serious problems that will test the OSCE. But the proof of the OSCE's effectiveness does not always lie in providing all the answers at any given moment, but in providing a place where

those answers can be found over time and where disruptive factors to peace and stability can be restrained.

**Where do you see those problems?**

We have a number of events ahead of us that have the potential to change the weather. There are various referendums that have been called in areas where the OSCE has responsibility. There may be decisions taken at the United Nations regarding the status of Kosovo. There is competition in certain areas between some of our participating States. All these have the potential to evolve in a way that may not necessarily be “soft”.

**What is your view on the Secretary General having a stronger role inside the Organization?**

Within their mandates, the Secretary General and the Secretariat serve participating States and provide them with assistance. If there is a desire for us to be active on specific issues, we are available to do so. We can be moderately pro-active in moving things forward when there is a problem. But we certainly cannot come in where we are not invited or requested to do so. I think this is our basic rule.

I have noticed a trend towards increasing demands on the Secretariat to get involved and do things. One of the latest requests put to the Secretariat, for example, is the OSCE-led international mission this October to assess the environmental impact of fires in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

**How important are the five Asian and six Mediterranean Partners to the OSCE? What's in it for the OSCE and what's in it for them?**

Most of the Partners are close to the OSCE geographically. They are also close to the OSCE in terms of values, so we have much to share and discuss with one another. They are Partners by choice — by mutual choice.

There is a great deal that we can and should do together — whether it is enhancing vital security concerns such as migration, and the dialogue of cultures, or tackling practical matters concerning drug trafficking, violent extremism and terrorism.

So, you see, the scope for building on the relationship with the Partners and moving them progressively towards the values and processes of the OSCE is enormous. We should be quite active in promoting this approach.

**Is there scope for other countries to become Partners?**

For those interested in sharing the OSCE's values, there is always scope to get closer to its work. But as I mentioned earlier, it is a mutual relationship.

**How serious is the OSCE and its management about increasing the number of women at a senior level in the Organization?**

The management of the OSCE depends on the good will and the support of participating States. We need strong women candidates for all jobs in order to fulfil the Gender Action Plan that has been adopted. We will be moving, I am sure, as fast as the presence of such candidates allows.

**What has been the biggest surprise for you since taking the job?**

The fascinating thing about the OSCE is that, in a way, it's a miracle that it continues to work. This is an Organization that is absolutely unique in its extreme decentralization, in the rule of consensus among very different States, and in the exceptional ambition and scope of its missions and the mandates it has set for itself.

In spite of this very unusual set-up that has been created over the years, it works. The Secretary General can, of course, make a significant contribution to ensure that it continues to work.

**Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut took office as Secretary General of the OSCE in June 2005, but he is far from a newcomer to the Organization. He served as France's Head of Delegation to what was then the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) from 1991 to 1994 and most of his career has been linked in some way to aspects of security. Prior to his OSCE appointment, he served as Director for Strategic Affairs at the French Defence Ministry. Born in Rabat, Morocco, he is a graduate of the Ecole Nationale d'Administration in Paris. Appointed by the Ministerial Council for a term of three years, the Secretary General acts as the representative of the Chairman-in-Office and as OSCE chief administrative officer, and derives authority from the collective decisions of participating States.**



The Secretary General with Senior Adviser Dov Lynch (left) and OSCE Spokesperson Martin Nesirky (right).