



14th OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL, BRUSSELS

CLOSING STATEMENT

by MINISTER KAREL DE GUCHT

CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE

5 December 2006

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will not repeat here the list of the decisions and declarations we adopted according to our heavy agenda, nor will I go over the many subjects on which I have dwelled at some length already in the course of our proceedings and in the Chair's perception paper.

I will limit myself to some conclusions on the basis of almost one year of experience as the Chair of this Organization. It is not that being in the Chair gives you special wisdom that others would not enjoy, but at least it gives a clearer grasp of how we operate together in the OSCE.

Belgium has put in a lot of effort, across the board so to speak, to restore a better balance between the three dimensions, the three pillars on which the OSCE is based.

Belgium did so, in line with the recommendations of the Eminent Persons' report and the wish - more or less strongly expressed - of a number of Participating States. Belgium did so in good faith, but there will be a need to carry this effort forward.

The decision we adopted just now to establish a three-committee structure under the Permanent Council will, in this respect, improve the quality of the preparatory process.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Security has traditionally been at the fore of the CSCE's/OSCE's preoccupations since its inception. Over the years our Organization has developed a broad and comprehensive concept of security, blending together the military and the civilian. In doing so, the OSCE proved not only to be innovative, but also effective, certainly in former years. The validity of the concept has now been recognized by practically everyone. But today, things look quite differently, as if the OSCE has become a victim of its past successes. The entire political-military side, once prominent, has become anemic, if not stagnant.

I do not want to berate the importance of what was achieved here on the issue of small arms and their trafficking – no doubt a question on which the OSCE has acquired a recognized expertise – or the significance of the fight against proliferation – a major concern for all of us in all the fora where we happen to meet – or to diminish in any sense the importance of the fight against terrorism or, for that matter, the need to address new threats in a combined and coordinated manner as suggested at the High-Level Seminar on Military doctrine held last February.

But there are certainly no good reasons to neglect, as is now the case, traditional arms control and military confidence-building issues. All the more so as the non-ratification of the adapted CFE treaty, should this situation persist, casts a shadow on the Treaty itself and, even more importantly, on the verification, transparency and - broadly speaking - on the CSBM regime that is part of the stability structure of Europe. We of course all know the reasons for this state of affairs. It has to do with a certain complacency about how we see the geo-strategic situation in Europe, which is not any more at risk of a major confrontation. But situations can unravel and, more to the point, the *acquis* can be put at risk. As for the CFE-Treaty, it is hostage to the non-implementation of the Istanbul commitments, and Istanbul itself is hostage to the non-resolution of the frozen conflicts. My point here is not to lay the blame on anyone's doorstep in particular, but only to remind every one of us that breaking out of this vicious circle will require more than expert meetings. It will call for political will and a sense of global responsibility that has so far escaped us.

Now, on the question of the protracted conflicts. There has been some movement, but apart from Nagorno-Karabakh, where the prospects look considerably better and where we were able to adopt a statement, this movement has been mainly circular. In other words, we are not closer to a solution than a year ago on Moldova and Georgia. Thus, by and large, conflicts remain frozen. But the level of frustration around the whole question has heated up, certainly as far as the Chairmanship is concerned, though not for a lack of trying on its part.

I know, and you all know, that there are many reasons for this situation, a situation which is furthermore damaging to the credibility of the OSCE as a whole, not to mention the protracted damage to the region and of course to the parties themselves. Let me repeat once again that this state of affairs is all the more regrettable as the parameters of the solutions are by now well-known. What is lacking in most cases is the political will to strike a deal, and any deal necessarily implies mutual concessions. The outcome is not, and by hypothesis cannot be “all or nothing”. In addition, there is a pressing need to prepare public opinions for such a negotiated outcome, the more so as a resumption of hostilities will not produce more lasting results than the previous ones.

In the OSCE we are well-placed to know that resorting to force is not only morally and politically wrong, we also know, or at least should know, that it only leads to further damage and suffering.

The OSCE is also well-placed, in view of its multidimensional character, to convey the message, this with the necessary force and conviction, that there is a clear human dimension to sovereignty and to territorial integrity. Principles do not exist in a vacuum or in isolation.

I therefore sincerely think that the time has come for each of us to take our responsibilities: for the OSCE community by providing the necessary support along with other international institutions, and for the parties, by accepting that there are no investments without risks and that all things considered the risks of renewed hostilities are greater than the risks of peace.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Chairmanships have priorities, and we cannot make progress on these priorities without the support of all participating States and the institutions. I thank you for that support. We have adopted decisions or declarations on transport and energy, on organized crime and criminal justice, on Kosovo, and on the sexual exploitation of children, thereby politically translating some of the Belgian priorities this year, and providing the basis for follow-up activities next year.

Boosting work on cross-dimensional issues, such as the fight against organized crime, and work in the second dimension, was not intended to, did not and should not affect the important acquis in the human dimension, quite to the contrary. True, the context for making progress in the human dimension was not always easy.

Yet I believe progress has been achieved on trafficking, the protection of children, media capacity building and the fight against intolerance. Secondly, we all agree that what is needed in the human dimension is first of all more and more effective implementation.

The fact that we were unable to adopt a decision to strengthen our engagement with human rights defenders is not only very unfortunate, it is also an indication of the fact that the context for making considerable progress in the human dimension is likely to remain difficult. Indeed, looking at the situation of human rights defenders in a particular country is as if looking through a magnifying glass at the human rights situation and the level of implementation of human dimension commitments as a whole in that country. It is my firm conviction and that of the vast majority of participating States that States committed to upholding human rights should protect and support those defending and promoting human rights.

A lot has been said and will continue to be said about the efficiency of the OSCE and even more about the lack thereof, and this, in part wrongly because we all know that the question has more to do with the attitude of Participating States than with structural or organizational problems within the Organization itself.

We have adopted elements of a reform package pursuant to the Ljubljana decision, including on ODIHR and the perennial question of election observation. In itself, this is an achievement which looked less certain a year ago.

I hope this will put an end not so much to the dynamic of reform which is intrinsic to all institutions but to this introspective episode which has lasted too long, actually since Sofia, and which threatened to paralyze the normal activity of the OSCE.

The importance of the concrete decisions which have been adopted on the efficiency resides less in the measures themselves than in the political significance of the conclusion of the process.

One should remember that the reform process was launched initially not so much for the sake of reform as such or for remedying a perceived lack of efficiency, but as a gesture of displeasure at the manner the OSCE had evolved.

What we did in practice is to bring a political response to a political concern thereby clearing the way for resuming cooperation and understanding within the organization. I hope that in that sense Brussels will mark a new departure for the OSCE.

Dear Ministers and Heads of Delegation, Dear Participants,

I thank you for your participation at this meeting and for your cooperation and support throughout the year. My sincere gratitude goes to the Secretary General Marc-Perrin de Brichambaut, the Heads of Institutions and Heads of Missions and all our OSCE-colleagues who work on a daily basis to further the goals of our organization. I also thank the Belgian OSCE-team in Brussels and in Vienna.

Finally, I would like to convey my best wishes of success to the incoming Spanish Chairmanship and to the next Chairman-in-Office my Spanish colleague Miguel Angel Moratinos.

Thank you.