



United States Mission to the OSCE

Intervention at the Thirteenth OSCE Ministerial Council

As delivered by Under Secretary for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns
to the 13th OSCE Ministerial Council, Ljubljana
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Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for giving me the opportunity today to speak on behalf of the United States. I'm very pleased to be here in Ljubljana representing our Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. On her behalf, I would like to stress the great importance the United States attaches to this organization, the OSCE, and to its 30-year record of helping to advance freedom, prosperity and security throughout the Trans-Atlantic area.

I also wish to begin by thanking our Slovene hosts for their work throughout the year and for what they have done to produce this Ministerial Council. We believe that Slovenia, as Chairman-in-Office, is an excellent example of the promise of the OSCE. In particular, our thanks and congratulations go to Minister Dimitrij Rupel for his tireless work throughout the last year.

Thirty years ago when the OSCE was founded, Slovenia did not exist as an independent state. In the violent break-up of the former Yugoslavia just over a decade ago, the OSCE and other international institutions helped assure a stable and peaceful future for this country. And Slovenians in turn quickly recognized the value of engaging fully with the international community. The fact that today Slovenia has taken on this leadership role as Chairman-in-Office speaks volumes about the value of the OSCE itself and of its historic achievements.

I would also like to recognize Congressman Alcee Hastings, who is the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. He is an American and we're very proud of everything that he has done for this organization, and for all the time, creativity and ideas that he has contributed to make this organization more successful. We are indebted to our Members of Parliament from across the OSCE, who personify the democratic values of this organization. We strongly support the Parliamentary Assembly's work and we thank you, Congressman, and all of your colleagues from all of the countries around this table for everything that you do.

The OSCE is a vital platform for advancing the cause of human freedom. In his Second Inaugural Address, my President - President Bush - said that "the policy of the United States is to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." These words are the expression not just of American policy, but they are also the expression of the OSCE.

As OSCE participating States, we recognize that freedom, human rights and democracy are not limited to those who speak a particular language, or are part of a particular culture, or ethnicity. They are the birthright of every person in every country in the world. We believe in the right to freedom, prosperity and security for every nation, and equally, we accept willingly the obligation to assist those whose freedom is unfulfilled. We have to embrace that mandate of assisting democracy. If the CSCE had not taken the position in the 1970s and 1980s that democracy was the future of Europe, then Europe might still be half free and half enslaved, as it was during the Communist era. We still have an obligation to reach out to those who live in countries where dictatorship is the norm, to help the people of those countries, and to promote democratic values.

We recognize that, through our participation in the OSCE, that these universal rights of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, economic development, and security can be a catalyst for change. We understand that the ideas of human dignity and democratic empowerment are too powerful to be reversed, or blocked, or avoided.

Some people say in this great global debate that we have today about the future of democracy in the world that we in democratic countries should not try to impose democracy on those countries that are not yet free. We do not impose democracy. Democracy is the natural right of all people. We believe that it is authoritarianism and dictatorship and totalitarianism that should not be imposed on people anywhere in the world. Dictatorship is imposed by secret police, and corrupt and politicized judiciaries, and the instruments of authoritarian rule. All of us in the OSCE must support democracy as the future of all states in Europe, West as well as East.

We do have the great good fortune to live in a time of hopeful change here in Europe. When the CSCE was founded, this continent was divided. The 1990s was the decade when most of Central and Eastern Europe gained its freedom and secured its future in NATO and the European Union. Today, we have the same obligation to the people of the Caucasus, the Balkans, and Central Asia. So our most vital strategic goal should be to create among all the members of this Trans-Atlantic community a continent that is united and free and stable and peaceful.

The OSCE is a critical Trans-Atlantic institution to help that cause. So we support the OSCE in our country, and we want to strengthen it, and we do not wish to see it weakened.

Secretary Rice was recently in Kyrgyzstan. She said there, after she met with the Kyrgyz authorities, that “democracy has to deliver for its own people” – both in elections and the democratic institutions that derive their legitimacy from elections. The OSCE recently, under Marc Perrin de Brichambaut’s leadership as our new Secretary General – and we are very pleased to see him here and very pleased to support the good work that he is doing – has observed elections in Kyrgyzstan, Albania, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan, and it did it very well. The United States believes political progress occurs when the principles embodied in the OSCE’s core agreements are respected. Accordingly, we strongly urge the Government of Uzbekistan to more fully cooperate with the OSCE, and to renew the mandate of the Center in Tashkent. We continue – along with many other countries here - to call on the Government of Uzbekistan to allow for an independent international inquiry into the events at Andijon.

In Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, OSCE election observers played a neutral, but authoritative role to help those countries achieve greater freedoms. The United States

applauds the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). It is the “gold standard” worldwide in election monitoring practices. The United States notes the valuable feedback ODIHR has provided in looking at our own elections system in the United States, and we call upon all OSCE States to welcome election follow-up visits by ODIHR. ODIHR should be respected and it should be strengthened. It performs the crucial function of this organization, which is support for democracy and elections – to which every one of us, by the way, has agreed.

The OSCE provides a forum in which we can confront problems and imperfections in our own societies. This year’s Cordoba Conference was an excellent example of that, because it dealt with anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, racism, and xenophobia. We look forward to future conferences like that in 2006, and we also welcome Romania’s offer to host a high-level meeting in 2007.

In our work, we have valuable partners in civil society and non-governmental organizations. They have a vital role in promoting OSCE principles and values. A strong, independent and transparent civil society, free from interference or pressure by governments: that is what contributes fundamentally to the promotion of democracy and human rights. One of the most important changes that we have seen in international politics over the last generation has been the rise of the NGOs, in number, in quality, and in the impact that they have in the world. The great majority of them, the overwhelming majority, do good work in development, the rule of law and democracy. So we should welcome them in our societies, and my country certainly welcomes all the NGOs that work in the United States.

The OSCE is on the cutting edge of some of the most difficult and intractable security challenges facing Europe today. Regional issues, including the so-called “frozen conflicts,” must be an area of special security concern for all of us. OSCE’s work there– whether it is in the Minsk Group, or field missions, or through the efforts of the Chairman-in-Office and the Permanent Council – should be among our highest priorities. They are difficult issues to resolve, some of them have lingered for decades. But no organization is better placed to take on this challenge: NATO can’t do it, the European Union can’t do it, the Council of Europe can’t do it, the United Nations isn’t doing it. So it really is up to the OSCE to perform this task of settling these lingering questions from the Cold War and allowing these societies to look forward and to modernize themselves.

In that spirit, the United States joins other OSCE governments in welcoming the Georgian government’s diplomatic action plan for South Ossetia. This is a very new and bold initiative for progress, and all of us should support it. The plan is not cast in stone, but it is the best basis so far on which, we believe, progress can be made. We applaud the May 30 Joint Statement by Georgia and Russia on issues relating to the withdrawal of the Russian bases from Georgia. This is an important step towards fulfillment of the remaining 1999 Istanbul Summit commitments.

All delegations around this table are aware of the importance my government attaches to these commitments. For us, their fulfillment continues to be a prerequisite for the ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty. These are not just words on paper: a basic principle of the CFE Treaty is the right of sovereign states to decide whether to allow stationing of foreign forces on their territory. Moldova and Georgia have made their choice: the forces should depart, and all OSCE member states should respect that choice and support them in it.

Thus, we regret the continued lack of movement in 2005 on the withdrawal of Russian military forces from Moldova, and we call upon the Russian Federation to use its vast influence in the region to resume and complete that important work. This would also send an important signal to the separatist regime in Tiraspol that a status quo which they may find convenient will not last forever. The United States was pleased to join the Moldovan political settlement talks as an observer. We are working closely with the European Union, and we hope that those talks can be reinvigorated.

We very much welcome the positive movement from Azerbaijan and Armenia toward resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We believe 2006 can be the year when Armenia and Azerbaijan may take major steps towards a strong and just peace. We encourage the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia to work vigorously with the Minsk Group Co-Chairs to achieve this goal and transform the painful divisions of the past so that the people of the Caucasus can put the Nagorno-Karabakh problem behind them.

Among the greatest success stories of the OSCE are the accomplishments of the seventeen field missions. We would like to take this opportunity to praise the field missions and their work, which addresses the fundamental issues of social and economic stability, youth and women's economic and social empowerment, anti-trafficking and counter-narcotics, and police training focusing on human rights. The OSCE has been immensely successful in the Balkan region, encouraging communities previously at war just ten years ago to rebuild themselves and return to a civil society.

The OSCE, ladies and gentlemen, remains full of promise for the future as well. While we are prepared for discussions to strengthen the OSCE and improve its effectiveness, we remain convinced the OSCE is not "broken" and it does not really need "fixing." Any attempt, therefore, to reform the OSCE must result in strengthening, but not weakening it. And we should strengthen ODIHR and especially its election mandate.

The OSCE's great promise is realized when 55 participating States, as a group, agree to pursue certain goals. We draw strength and flexibility from our combination of consensus decision-making and decentralized implementation. Since its inception, consensus has been a means of framing our overarching goals and making major decisions. But, a Permanent Council decision is the beginning, not the end, of a chain of events: with a decision made, steps should be taken to faithfully carry out the wishes of the Council, and a host of other decisions which follow. While no OSCE body or office may operate against the wishes of the Permanent Council, or, indeed, this council - the Ministerial Council - significant latitude is provided OSCE representatives to focus on the day-to-day decisions, while working toward our common, consensus-driven goals. That's an important principle. We cannot be successful if we don't trust our people to carry out the decisions that people at this table make - and we trust the people of the OSCE, its staff, its field missions, to carry out our will.

We are in the thirtieth anniversary year. It is very clear that much has been accomplished, but that much remains before us. So in closing, I would like to echo the words of the American President who signed the Helsinki Final Act, President Gerald Ford. He said thirty years ago at the CSCE, "History will judge this conference not by what we say here today, but by what we do tomorrow - not by the promises we make, but by the promises we keep."

Thank you very much.