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DE EERSTE MINISTER

OPENING ADDRESS BY GUY VERHOFSTADT  
PRIME MINISTER OF BELGIUM  
AT THE 14TH OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Brussels, 4 December 2006.

Excellences,  
Eminents Chefs de Délégations,  
Mesdames et Messieurs

Je suis très heureux de pouvoir tous vous accueillir à ce 14<sup>ème</sup> Conseil ministériel de l'OSCE.

A year has passed since the ministerial meeting in Ljubljana. And 2006 has seen the OSCE active and present on the field. Monitoring elections. Working on energy security. Dealing with small weapons. Addressing questions of internationally organised crime or trade in human beings. The OSCE worked on the respect for the freedom of speech. It invested further in good neighbourly relations. It tried to contribute to resolving frozen conflicts. It continued to promote tolerance and dialogue.

These activities reflect the fact that the challenge for the OSCE is no longer to define new common principles but rather to implement them, and to build appropriate democratic institutions that guarantee their implementation. These activities also confirm the importance of the unique cross-dimensional OSCE mandate to promote security through cooperation in Europe. Its approach to security in Europe, based on cooperation between equal partners which integrates the politico-military, economic, environmental, and human dimensions, is ambitious but very necessary. Its tradition of dialogue and consensus building is of high value, especially in times where different religions or cultures sometimes clash.

The activities confirm the existence of a useful set of instruments and experience in matters of conflict prevention and assistance to democratisation. They finally confirm the usefulness of its large operational network of field missions.

We have built a body of commitments, norms and principles, which bind us together. This OSCE “acquis” of shared values and mutual commitments should be the basis to further develop a common vision for the OSCE to meet the challenges of tomorrow and a new sense of common purpose. That is our common task.

A main task of the OSCE to foster security is conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation. Through its institutions and field missions it has proven its added value in this regard. Its field presence in Kosovo is an important part of the efforts of the international community in the creation of peace and stability in that region.

Resolution of the so-called ‘frozen’ conflicts is a more difficult mission to accomplish. The ultimate responsibility for finding solutions resides with the parties themselves. Yet, the OSCE and its Chairman-in-Office should avail itself of every opportunity to bring the peace process in those conflicts forward and to assist the parties in reaching a solution. I would like to commend foreign Minister De Gucht for all the efforts he has made.

In September 2004 I had the honour to open, here at the Heysel, the first OSCE Conference on tolerance, combating racism and xenophobia and discrimination. It is a subject which is close to my heart. And I am glad to see that promotion of tolerance has been an important issue for the OSCE this year. It has to remain so in the future. Respect, dialogue and understanding between cultures, religions and civilizations is a challenge we all – governments and citizens – must meet in this age of globalization. The OSCE, as a regional platform in Europe and beyond, and with its intensive interaction with ‘civil society’ in all our countries, is ideally placed to contribute to the promotion of tolerance. The OSCE deserves full recognition of the efforts already undertaken, and full support for its further efforts. It also can show to other regions that a peaceful coexistence is possible.

I would wish that other regions such as the Middle East would be able to profit from the experience the OSCE has built up. Would a similar organization in the Middle East not be conducive to more mutual understanding and respect and a peaceful living together ?

Excellences,

Eminents Chefs de Délégations,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

L’OSCE a joué un rôle clé pour combler le profond fossé européen hérité de la guerre froide. Nous ne devrions pas considérer le devoir comme accompli ni l’organisation comme superflue. Il reste du pain sur la planche. Et ce défi se présente à nous tous, collectivement. L’OSCE est un organe collégial. Les actions et les engagements relèvent de la responsabilité collégiale de toutes les institutions et de tous les Etats participants.

Je suis persuadé que chacun d’entre vous, en qualité de représentant des Etats participants et des pays partenaires, de président de l’assemblée parlementaire, de secrétaire général ou de chef des institutions de l’OSCE, entend mettre tout en œuvre pour faire de ce rassemblement un succès. Il vous appartiendra de faire le point sur les progrès réalisés par rapport aux quatre priorités fixées au début de la Présidence belge :

- poursuivre la réforme institutionnelle de l'OSCE ;
- rééquilibrer les différentes dimensions de l'OSCE en renforçant la dimension économique ;
- améliorer la cohérence des activités de l'OSCE en matière de lutte contre le crime organisé. Ce problème concerne tous les pays de l'OSCE, qu'ils soient d'Orient ou d'Occident. Il préoccupe également directement nos citoyens ;
- jouer activement le rôle de médiateur en toute honnêteté (« honest broker ») à la recherche d'une solution aux conflits régionaux au sein de la zone de l'OSCE.

Avant de vous laisser entre les mains de votre Président en exercice, permettez-moi de conclure par trois remarques.

Premièrement, je tiens à féliciter le Ministre De Gucht pour ses efforts considérables et son engagement sérieux tout au long de l'année écoulée. Karel, je tenais à te dire « Mission accomplie » et, dans le même temps, félicitations à toute ton équipe qui a accompli un travail exceptionnel.

Deuxièmement, je vous remercie tous sincèrement du soutien que vous avez témoigné au Président en exercice.

Enfin, je veux adresser tous mes vœux à l'Espagne et à mon cher ami le Ministre Moratinos, lui qui va reprendre le flambeau de la présidence de l'OSCE. Bonne chance à toi.

Je vous remercie.