

Benita Ferrero-Waldner

European Commissioner for External Relations and European
Neighbourhood Policy

OSCE Ministerial Council

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

OSCE Ministerial Council

Madrid, 29 November 2007

Mr. Chairman, Dear Miguel-Angel

Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first thank Miguel-Ángel Moratinos and his energetic team for managing and steering the OSCE in critical times.

2007 has been a particularly **intense year** for the OSCE region and the OSCE as an organization. Some people have even argued that the OSCE is experiencing a crisis. Some even go so far as to **question its relevance**.

I disagree with that. I believe that, in the light of the challenges of today's world, with security having several dimensions and facing various threats, the OSCE is far from having exhausted its mission.

On the contrary, it continues to provide us with **added value** in promoting peace, human rights and democracy within our region.

Firstly, the OSCE's **inclusive membership** in the pan-European and transatlantic region is a major asset. The OSCE is a partnership among equals, in which policies are subject to free and **open discussion** and to peer-review. Curtailing this open dialogue would therefore be wrong.

Secondly, the OSCE is a pioneer in protecting **comprehensive security**, beyond strictly military considerations and including a human, environmental and economic dimension.

Given the complex nature of today's threats, that is important. The OSCE bolsters **broad "human security"**, a concept which I actively pursue with all instruments of the EU's external relations. The OSCE and the EU thus remain close partners.

Thirdly, the OSCE's **valuable acquis**, including its field missions and institutions, and the very principles and commitments shared by its participating States, continue to make the organisation invaluable. It is essential that this acquis can be sustained. The same holds for the OSCE's **flexibility** and its capacity to react quickly, which must also be kept.

Another important activity of OSCE is **election observation** through ODIHR. ODIHR's approach is credible and comprehensive and has enabled OSCE to conduct numerous election observation missions in many OSCE member states. We continue to have great confidence in the election observation **activities of ODIHR**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me briefly touch on **a few core priorities** of our work in the OSCE context.

First, the OSCE and the European Union cooperate closely in the Union's **neighbourhood**, which we cover with the intensified European Neighbourhood Policy.

Clearly, we all share a common interest in fostering stability: By countering terrorism, organised crime, trafficking in weapons, drugs and human beings, environmental degradation and resource depletion; And by pursuing a positive agenda of economic reforms, good governance, respect for the rule of law and democracy.

We just experienced a critical, unstable situation in **Georgia**, one of our ENP partner countries. Both the EU and OSCE should continue their efforts to support Georgia in trying to overcome the crisis through democratic, peaceful means.

In this respect I welcome that Georgia – immediately after announcing the holding of presidential elections and after the state of emergency was lifted - issued an invitation to ODIHR to observe the elections. Like OSCE media representative Haraszti, we also believe that restrictions of pluralism of the media would severely damage the fairness of elections in Georgia. I look therefore forward the full restoration of media diversity.

The EU will **intensify the ENP** and render its incentives more tangible and tailor-made. Our big ENP conference of September gave new momentum to this project. We will continue to work in partnership with our neighbours to support local reforms and foster stability and prosperity in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. And we will in particular work with all OSCE bodies to ensure the complementarity and added value of our respective policies.

Kosovo is another key issue on which close coordination with the OSCE is taking place. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo continues to play an essential role, also after the conclusion of the Status talks, notably as regards capacity building. Our own EU planning for Kosovo is thus based on the assumption of a continued OSCE field presence in 2008.

I also hope that we can cooperate with the OSCE and share our expertise on border-security and border-management around **Afghanistan**. Clearly, more efficient border management would make a difference for regional security, help support counter-narcotics efforts and improve prospects for regional trade and economic growth.

The European Commission is already a major donor in the area of border management in Central Asia, through the BOMCA programme since 2002. In addition, border- management and -security are a major focus of EC assistance for Afghanistan. A border crossing point between Afghanistan and Pakistan has now been completed while work for a crossing point with Tajikistan is underway.

Finally, let me add that the OSCE has a role to play regarding the link between security and the **environment, including climate change**. The OSCE can make a useful contribution in identifying environmental threats to the stability of the region, and to promote adequate policy responses. I am confident that the work at the UN Climate Conference in Bali next week will also feed into the OSCE reflection.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking at the OSCE's positive work and at the challenges ahead, I believe that any talk of crisis simply misses the point. The OSCE is very much alive and most needed for the success of our common political efforts. We should **concentrate our energy** and expertise on strengthening the organisation to tackle the issues that we jointly face.

The European Commission will therefore **continue to support** the Organization in the fulfilment of its important missions.

Let me conclude by thanking Spain again, and by wishing to Finland a very fruitful Chairmanship in 2008. Please rest assured that the European Commission and I in particular shall spare no effort to help.