

1. What are the main priorities of the Slovenian Chairmanship for this year?

We are keen to revitalise, reform and rebalance the 55-nation Organization to ensure it is more responsive to the needs of all participating States. In order to make a start in addressing the current situation, I have proposed a Triple “R” agenda for Slovenia’s Chairmanship: Revitalize, Reform, and Rebalance. Among the top priorities this year I would single out issues such as fighting terrorism, developing a new border security concept, combating human trafficking and encouraging migration and integration. But first of all, we need to swiftly secure an agreement on a 2005 budget and scales of contribution for the 55 participating States. The OSCE offers good value for money. It is effective and in many cases unique in the tasks it performs. It has done a lot to help build a new and better Europe. If we believe in the OSCE, we must find appropriate funds for it. We also need to overcome the current polarisation within the Organization and prevent new political fault lines from reappearing.

2. You mentioned terrorism. What role does the fight against international terrorism play in the work of the OSCE?

The fight against terrorism has always been high on our agenda. Last December, at the Ministerial meeting in Sofia, OSCE foreign ministers pledged to enhance their counter-terrorism efforts while maintaining their commitment to the protection of human rights. We can build on the OSCE’s solid practical achievements in areas such as improving our defences against the threat to civilian aircraft from shoulder-carried missiles and making it more difficult for terrorists to cross borders using forged passports. This year we will also deal with the issue of container security. As you know, world trade depends on container traffic and we must ensure that terrorists do not try to use containers to launch attacks. The OSCE is good at bringing together experts in these fields to work on very practical measures to make us all more secure. Slovenia is keen to press ahead with developing an OSCE border security concept, which is very important for preventing criminals and terrorists from crossing international frontiers with impunity.

3. At a recent news conference in Vienna you said that you agree with some of the critical remarks from the Russian side concerning the work of the OSCE, especially on the role of the OSCE in election monitoring and its evaluation of the democratic standards of different elections. What was it that you meant by this and what, as Chairman, do you not like in the work of the OSCE?

We take very seriously the criticism from the Russian Federation and other CIS countries about the work of the Organization. I therefore read carefully the Moscow Declaration and the Astana Address. I am confident that my 1 February meeting with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow will help to map the future of the OSCE, including its election-monitoring, as well as other important issues. Reform is also one of the main topics of the Slovenian Chairmanship. If other international organisations are reforming, and adapting to the new challenges, I do not know why the OSCE should not do the same. Besides I am

tasked by Sofia Ministerial decision to establish a Panel of Eminent Persons and act as their focal point in defining new impetus to political dialogue and provide strategic vision for the Organization in the twenty-first century. I have full confidence in the work of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which is in charge of our election-monitoring activities. It is widely respected as the world's leading election-monitoring body and its advice is increasingly sought by countries outside the OSCE. ODIHR works by well-established, objective and systematic criteria in establishing whether election processes live up to the commitments, which all OSCE countries have signed up to. It does not take sides. But we can always talk about ways of making things even better. If some OSCE countries want to discuss how we can make our election activities more effective, I am happy to engage in that debate. I would also encourage Russia to get more involved in the process of election observation by sending more observers to take part in ODIHR missions. As far as other concerns from Russia are concerned, we are devoting more attention and resources to the political-military and economic/environmental aspects of security, of course without diluting the human dimension commitments, which we all subscribe to. The OSCE works on the basis of consensus. This means that all 55 participating States must agree to any new initiative or idea before it is implemented. So it is not always easy to reach an agreement. It often takes a lot of patience and compromise. We need to listen to all sides, hear all opinions. But we have so much in common, so many shared interests and goals, that I am confident we will reach agreement on major issues in the end.

4. How can the OSCE help improve the socio-political environment in Northern Caucasus?

Following the closure of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya at the beginning of 2003, there have been no OSCE activities in the Northern Caucasus. But OSCE participating States have been following developments in this region with great interest and I believe that they would be ready to consider ways to provide assistance in strengthening stability and improving the socio-political environment in the Northern Caucasus, if this were to be requested by the Russian Federation. Let me point out, however, that the OSCE is contributing in a variety of ways to enhancing stability in the Caucasus region as a whole, for instance through its involvement in the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts, as well as through its active support for the UN-led peace-process in Abkhazia. Moreover, I personally think it would be useful to retain a presence of international monitors on Georgian territory along the Ingush, Chechen and Dagestan segments of the border with the Russia Federation. The OSCE Border Monitoring Mission, whose mandate expired on December 31, played a positive stabilising and confidence-building role in that region over the last few years, which I believe was in the interests of all the countries concerned and I hope we can build on that.

5. How do you view the current state of relations between the OSCE and Russia and the role that Russia plays being a participating State?

I would not put the OSCE and Russia on different sides of the table. Russia is an essential part of the Organization and has been since the negotiations that led to the Helsinki Final Act more than 30 years ago. It will always play an important role. All OSCE countries have their own interests and the OSCE is a key forum for dialogue on security issues of concern to us all. The OSCE played an important role in tearing down the walls that divided Europe and it

helped bring the East and West closer together. It is working hard as we speak to make Europe safer and more prosperous. It is up to all of us, Russia included, to ensure that the Organization is as effective as possible in meeting the needs of all participating States, thus preventing new dividing lines from reappearing in Europe.

6. You mentioned the 30th anniversary of the CSCE/OSCE. What has been achieved during this period and what lies ahead?

Without doubt, the most important contribution of the OSCE/CSCE in the past 30 years has been in helping to bring about an end to the Cold War and a smooth transition into a new era of democracy and open borders. The Helsinki process of co-operative security remains valid and relevant today. It helped States to talk and listen to each other, even through the many dark days when agreements seemed impossible. Thanks to the CSCE, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, human rights - a long-standing taboo in East-West relations - became a legitimate subject of dialogue and were no longer the exclusive internal concern of any participating State. In the military security field, the CSCE helped to reduce tensions significantly by implementing confidence-building measures, which enhanced military transparency. At a time of fundamental mistrust between East and West, CSCE countries opened up many military activities to inspection by their partners. Those exchanges of military information are still taking place today but we now tend to take them for granted. There are many achievements of which the OSCE can be proud since it was created 10 years ago. I would single out a few from the past 10 years: The OSCE has helped to end civil war in Tajikistan, constrained conflict the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Georgia and played a major role in building stable democratic societies in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, and most recently assisted in defusing the situation in Ukraine. In Albania in 1997/98, the OSCE Presence played a key role in stabilising the country after the complete breakdown of law and order that followed the collapse of fraudulent pyramid investment schemes. Long-term OSCE field missions play a unique role in defusing conflicts before they erupt. Russian diplomats, police officers and other officials play a valuable role in these operations and I am grateful for their contribution. They help to put in place the building-blocks of stable democratic societies through a broad range of activities that include training police officers, stemming the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons, border monitoring, combating human trafficking, monitoring elections and reforming constitutions and legislative structures.