

MC.DEL/46/06  
4 December 2006

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

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FIRST DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN, AT THE FOURTEENTH MEETING OF  
THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Brussels, 4 December 2006

Mr. Chairman,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to welcome our colleagues taking part in this meeting and to associate myself with the words of gratitude addressed to the Belgian Chairmanship for its hospitality.

This year in the OSCE has been characterized by discussions on reforming the Organization and adapting it to the current international political situation and to new threats to security.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that a growing number of States recognize the need for substantial rather than symbolic reforms in the Organization, a number of its participating States and some institutions are stubbornly trying to maintain the current status quo in the OSCE. In our view, the relevance of the OSCE and its future will depend first and foremost on the degree to which the participating States have the necessary political will to make profound changes in the Organization.

The OSCE system remains in crisis, brought about by the high level of bureaucracy in its work, the Organization's symbolic role in resolving matters of regional security and the imbalance that exists among the three dimensions. The delegation of Uzbekistan already mentioned this at last year's Ministerial Council in Ljubljana.

The current state of affairs in the OSCE, in which most of the Organization's attention is focused on developments in some countries while serious problems in others are deliberately ignored, in which some States believe that they have rights while others have only obligations, and in which political dialogue is transformed into a situation where the "elders" attempt to dictate what the "younger generation" does, is indicative of a continued selective approach and the application of double standards within the Organization.

In the opinion of Uzbekistan, it is unacceptable to use OSCE institutions as a means of exerting political pressure and there is a need to clarify the question of their autonomy. In line with the second part of the Ljubljana decision on strengthening the effectiveness of the OSCE, we believe that the work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is in need of particular improvement.

We believe that the OSCE and its institutions should focus on solving urgent problems that concern all the participating States — combating new threats and challenges such as terrorism, religious extremism, illicit trafficking in narcotics drugs and arms, illegal migration, intolerance and discrimination, and also the question of co-operation in economic and environmental matters, culture and education.

Furthermore, it is important to strengthen inter-institutional co-operation between the OSCE and other regional organizations involved in ensuring security.

Mr. Chairman,

The development of events in the Central Asian region illustrates the convergence of the conflicting processes that unfold throughout the OSCE area. The desire of the people of Central Asia to integrate into the global community and create conditions for stability and sustainable development is being seriously tested by the combination of transnational threats such as terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking.

It is becoming ever clearer today that extremist organizations, with their religious slogans and ideological aggression, are advocating the seizure of political power by violent means and are seeking to undermine peace and security in Central Asia and shatter stability in other parts of the world.

In that connection, we have noted with regret on several occasions that within the OSCE there is still no common understanding of the nature of the threats that face us today and that on the territory of some participating States extremist movements preaching enmity and hatred and refusing to accept the ideas of democracy, equality and individual rights continue to operate unhindered.

The lessons of recent years have convinced us that it is far more difficult to deal with the aftermath of terrorist and extremist activities than it is to prevent such activities in good time. Uzbekistan is in favour of making as much use as possible of the resources of pre-emptive diplomacy, which it has been actively engaging in since its first days of independence.

Distinguished Participants,

Against this background, the desire to force political processes in the Central Asian countries from the outside without taking into account the specific cultural and historical features of the region and the mentality of its people is a cause of particular concern.

It must be recognized that there is no universal model for democracy that fits all States. History has shown that the development of democracy should not be forced or imposed from the outside; if this is done, it can result in violent social crises in society and can even facilitate access to power by radical forces.

We are truly convinced that the fundamental values of democracy, although universal, should be ensured in each country with due regard for national traditions and the outlook and values characteristic of its people.

Security in Central Asia and throughout the OSCE area is directly linked today to the processes taking place in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the situation in that country still cannot be described as stable. This is caused to a large extent by the slow pace of the socio-economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan. One of the most important prerequisites for lasting peace in Afghanistan is the achievement of tangible progress in the implementation of programmes to assist the Afghan people in the economic, social and humanitarian spheres.

On the subject of Afghanistan, we should not fail to mention the extremely urgent regional and global problem caused by the increase in the production of narcotics in that country and their transit through Central Asia.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, this year opium cultivation in Afghanistan increased by 59 per cent reaching a volume of more than six thousand tons, equivalent to 92 per cent of the global supply of this dangerous substance. We should also like to point out that 70 per cent of the heroin of Afghan origin today is sold in European countries.

The international community, including the OSCE, must step up its efforts to combat the drug threat emanating from Afghanistan. Otherwise, the narcotic cancerous tumour in Afghanistan will spread and metastasize into corruption, violence and terrorism both within the country and beyond its borders.

In a few days' time, the people of Uzbekistan will commemorate the fourteenth anniversary of the adoption of the national Constitution.

During a short period of time, having created the main foundations for statehood, Uzbekistan has established itself as an independent and recognized member of the international community.

The country has made great progress in terms of its economy, social development, democracy building and the establishment of a civil society. In the last year alone, important decisions were adopted to further liberalize criminal legislation and step up reforms in the political sphere.

The Uzbek leadership has declared its intention to abolish the death penalty in 2008. Much organizational and preparatory work is currently under way to ensure the effective implementation of an entire range of measures connected with the abolition of the death penalty.

As you are aware, the President of Uzbekistan recently submitted to the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) a draft constitutional law on strengthening the role of political parties in the renewal and further democratization of the government and in the modernization of the country. The implementation of the provisions of this document will undoubtedly have a considerable effect on the entire system of government in Uzbekistan and on the progress of social, economic and political reforms and the democratic renewal of the country.

I should like to emphasize in particular that toleration and tolerance have always been and will remain a most important component of the State policy of Uzbekistan.

Representatives of 18 religious denominations, including Islam, the Orthodox Church, Judaism, Catholicism and other religions, live in peace and harmony in our Republic today and freely practise their religions. More than 2,200 religious organizations have been registered. Over the past few years there has been no recorded instance of interreligious conflict or of conflicts between religions and the State authorities.

Representatives of more than 120 ethnic groups and nationalities live on the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

We understand that the pace of our reforms may not satisfy some people. You will, however, agree that democracy cannot be built in a single generation. History has shown that democratic institutions and civil society can develop successfully only if the socio-economic basis of society is strengthened, and this is possible solely in an environment of stability. For that reason, in the process of democratization, Uzbekistan will continue to favour evolutionary and systematic reforms with a view first and foremost to ensuring peace in society and increasing the prosperity of its people.

In conclusion, I should like to stress that having deliberately chosen the path of democracy, Uzbekistan remains committed to the OSCE's principles and values and is ready to continue constructive and mutually beneficial co-operation with the Organization.

Thank you for your attention.