

**At last a genuine “public image”?**

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## **AT LAST A GENUINE “PUBLIC IMAGE”?**

**The OSCE is fighting for greater public visibility**

**by Reinhard Veser**

Vienna, in November. “I have 55 bosses,” says Marc Perrin de Brichambaut. The 55 don’t get along all that well, and his obligations to all of them are more or less equal. De Brichambaut is Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and his bosses are the 55 participating States in Europe, North America, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The range of countries whose representatives he has to deal with extends from Uzbekistan, whose regime doesn’t attach much value to democracy and freedom, to the United States, which would clearly like to see both things established there. “All of them have the same claim on your energy and time,” says de Brichambaut. He works in a diplomatic minefield through which he strides with concentration but with a friendly smile.

Only a few weeks before he took up his duties in June, the Organization presented a very sorry picture. Russia was blocking the budget for the current year because it believed that the OSCE had been a willing tool of the West during the so-called “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine. People were talking about the end of the OSCE unless the participating States succeeded in agreeing on a reform plan that would accommodate Russia’s wishes by the time of the Ministerial Council meeting in Ljubljana at the beginning of December.

Moscow and the governments of a number of former Soviet republics – from Belarus to Uzbekistan – demand that the OSCE concern itself less with monitoring elections, democratic standards and human rights and devote greater attention to traditional security policy and the fight against terrorism. In order to gain better control over the loosely organized and decentralized Organization, which does not have “members” but only “participating States”, Russia wants to force a more rigid structure on it. One feature of this plan is to strengthen the position of the Secretary General, who in the past has stood well in the shadow of the annually rotating Chairman-in-Office – this year the Foreign Minister of Slovenia, Dimitrij Rupel. This is a demand that many Western States, who want to see more efficiency in the Organization, do not reject out of hand.

The 56-year-old French diplomat de Brichambaut could therefore become the first Secretary General to serve as the Organization’s “public image.” This is a recommendation in a report on reform of the Organization submitted during the summer by seven diplomats from the United States, Russia, Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, Croatia and Kazakhstan on behalf of all OSCE States. On the basis of this report, negotiations on the future of the Organization have been going on since early autumn; one of the few questions that just might be decided by the time of the Ministerial Conference on 5 and 6 December is that of the Secretary General. More important than any possible specific result, however, is the fact that

the climate in the Organization has become much less tense as a result of the report. No one is talking any longer about the end of the OSCE, even though Russian diplomats persist in hinting that this year's budget crisis could very well be repeated.

Marc Perrin de Brichambaut had his first experience with the Organization – at that time called the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) – fifteen years ago at a time when hopes were flying high. One year after the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, the heads of State and Government of 35 States gathered and adopted a “Charter for a New Europe” with a section heading that read: “A New Era of Democracy, Peace and Unity”. De Brichambaut was at that time the representative of France to the CSCE, a position he held for three years. He laconically describes the difference between then and now by saying: “Today we don't get so much spontaneous agreement.”

Whether or not the OSCE is in a state of crisis is in itself controversial. In contrast to the Russians, who for years have been speaking more and more loudly and threateningly about a crisis and a loss of authority on the part of the Organization, the Americans see no reason for such pessimism because the OSCE had, after all, fulfilled its task of spreading the values of freedom and democracy in an admirable way. Now, what does the new Secretary General say to this? “My opinion is not really of any significance. If the Americans say that the work of the Organization is good, that pleases me; if the Russians say that there is a crisis, then I must take this seriously.”

Some of the criticisms brought forward by Russia he rejects out of hand – for example, the reproach that the OSCE concerned itself only with countries “to the East of Vienna”, where its headquarters are located. Why, Russian diplomats ask, does the OSCE concern itself with all conflicts in the area of the former Soviet Union, but not with Northern Ireland or with the disturbances in France? This is a perception of the Russians, de Brichambaut says. Only recently, Great Britain, following an assessment by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE, altered its election laws on certain points in order to adapt them to the standards of the Organization. The Secretary General speaks very emphatically about the “modesty of the oldest democracy in the world”. As to the Russian demand that the OSCE should do more in the battle against terrorism, he points to the Organization's already existing activities and to the possibility that the Russians themselves might do more. “The Americans are financing a number of projects in this area. I would be grateful if the Russians were as active as the Americans.”

De Brichambaut contests, however, the notion that Russia, with its demand for new focus areas in the OSCE, intends to sideline the aim of expanding democracy, a process known in the OSCE as the “human dimension”. “The Russians are not criticizing the human dimension. They are happy that this dimension exists.” This could almost have been said by a Russian diplomat. As an example of Russia's interest in the promotion of democracy by the OSCE, he points out that before the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, Russia had requested training for 48 election monitors to serve in the Mission there. The fact that Russia then protested loudly against the criticism expressed by the OSCE election monitors regarding the conduct of the election is something that de Brichambaut remains quiet about in a friendly manner.

If the tone, formulation and context were slightly different, another one of his sentences could easily have come from a Russian diplomat: “The OSCE created the conditions required for the expansion of NATO and the European Union.” The Russian

version of this sentence comes from the pen of the man in the Russian Foreign Ministry who is in charge of OSCE affairs. This gentleman, Yakovenko, says, "Our partners in the West began to treat the Organization as an instrument which could be used to restructure the southeastern and eastern parts of the continent in accordance with their own standards." That is the core of all Russian reproaches leveled against the OSCE.

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