

## THE OSCE AND EUROPEAN VALUES

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Policemen who train their Central Asian colleagues in the maintenance of public order with due respect for human rights and the rights of minorities, hundreds of observers who monitor the holding of elections, fifty-five ambassadors to the OSCE who confer regularly on arms control and crisis control at the boundaries of Europe: these are some of the concrete results to have emerged from the common commitments undertaken fifteen years ago, on 20 November 1990, by thirty-five States in the Charter of Paris.

Making a complete break with the heritage of the past, the heads of State and Government declared their resolve to see a new era of democracy, peace and unity for a free Europe in its entirety. They committed themselves to securing and upholding certain values: human rights, democracy, the rule of law, economic freedom, security and unity. This solemn affirmation of common principles and orientations marked an exceptional moment. It coincided with the restoration of unity in Germany and remodelling of the map of Europe. The project was a powerful one, but the follow-up has been less than perfect. In many States the transition to democratic practice and respect for the rule of law is proving to be difficult and uneven. Some crises in the Balkans and the Caucasus have still not been resolved. The civil societies that did so much for the success of the ideas born in Helsinki have not always measured up to the challenges.

However, the ambition to see all component parts of the greater Europe sharing the same values is still doing its work. These values are a condition for membership of NATO and the European Union. Today the United States, the European Union and the countries belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States on the fringes of Russia are still working together within the OSCE. Three examples demonstrate this:

- In the Balkans, it is on the basis of the values espoused in the Charter that a new equilibrium among peoples and States has been found. Without respect for the rights of minorities, without viable democratic institutions, without the rule of law, without economic and social development, the temptation to revert to ethnic estrangement and armed violence could regain the upper hand. For more than ten years now every French taxpayer has paid his share towards the work of stabilization carried out by the five OSCE field missions. A similar task has been undertaken in the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Social and political tensions are very high in these countries, as was shown by the events in Andijan, Uzbekistan, last May;
- Monitoring of elections, a task to which the OSCE contributes through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), has become the measure and the guarantee of the progress made by societies towards modern democracy. Such monitoring has just been carried out in Azerbaijan by multinational teams, and it will soon be done in Kazakhstan and Ukraine as well. This is a matter of interest to all participating States of the OSCE and amounts to a continuous process of improving electoral practices;

- The new threats to the security of individuals are also a challenge to our values, and the 55 participating States constitute a kind of laboratory generating ideas as well as a permanent forum. With a view to preserving the dignity of individual human beings, the OSCE is taking part in efforts to combat trafficking in persons. To emphasize the importance of tolerance, of combating anti-Semitism and of preserving mutual respect in societies which are more and more inhomogeneous, the OSCE is taking appropriate action. It is following up the problems of migration and integration. It is also involved in the debate on the use of the Internet by racist propaganda and by terrorist groups. Confronted by the complexity and the challenges of contemporary societies, the OSCE is contributing to active watchfulness. The common security of all Europe's inhabitants, living on three continents, depends on shared values. These values create stability when they are rooted in the very heart of civil society and are understood by its citizens. Their preservation requires a continuous common effort — this is the message put forth by the Charter of Paris. It is as meaningful today as it was at the start. This remains an indispensable project if we want to prevent new lines of division from appearing on our continent and cope effectively with the multiple dimensions of the crises that are tearing our societies apart.

(The Secretary General of the OSCE.)

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