

Check against delivery

**Address by the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. João Soares**  
**17<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council, 1 December 2009**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Just a few weeks ago we commemorated the fall of the Berlin Wall. I fully share the joy of those events. Nonetheless, I was disappointed at the lack of public attention to the OSCE at that time, because, as we all know, the CSCE process played a critical role in the monumental events of 1989 and 1990. Certainly at the time, our citizens clearly recognised the importance of the CSCE. This of course is because the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent documents included excellent, comprehensive and far-reaching commitments.

The real strength of the OSCE is that countries are held accountable to the commitments to which they themselves have agreed. In the Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, and with key commitments from Copenhagen and Moscow, we already have a body of pledges that I feel we should be focusing on applying instead of trying to produce new texts. To be brutally honest, I seriously doubt that today we would be able to reach agreement on many of the issues we agreed to in Helsinki, Copenhagen and Paris.

Unfortunately, our willingness and ability to seriously review implementation of our commitments have slowly been eroding in recent years. I believe that it is time to once again focus on whether we – all of us – are keeping our promises.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Two weeks ago I addressed the Permanent Council and heard that in recent weeks our diplomats in Vienna have been engaged in lengthy meetings to develop decisions for this Council to agree upon. I don't intend to downplay the importance of the topics addressed in these texts. But I do not believe that they offer a major contribution to the excellent body of commitments that the OSCE already has. And so it is my hope that the OSCE can be reinvigorated through a genuine review process at the highest political level.

Paraphrasing an American President at the Helsinki Summit in 1975: the promises we make today are not as important as the promises we keep. Today, we should see how well we have kept the commitments and promises we made to each other in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, rather than trying to negotiate new texts that are superfluous.

As to implementation, OSCE field missions represent the core of the OSCE's current work, and they must be maintained and indeed strengthened. However, their ability to help participating States implement their OSCE commitments is being hampered by the unworkable processes in Vienna and constant cuts to the OSCE budget.

Election observation is another core element through which we judge the health of our democratic systems. The OSCE's real strength in the field of election observation is that we have clear

standards to which all OSCE countries have agreed. Credible assessment of compliance with these political commitments clearly benefits from parliamentarians' expert political judgment, and this will continue to be a priority area for the Parliamentary Assembly.

Unfortunately, in recent years there has been a growing tendency for OSCE discussions and activities to get bogged down in bureaucracy and in the cumbersome decision-making processes in Vienna. This raises serious concerns about the increasing lack of political relevance and visibility of the OSCE. Largely due to the current non-transparent decision-making process, the decision-making structures in Vienna are virtually unable to reach agreement, particularly on key political issues. Instead, existing language is reshuffled, producing an endless pile of papers which add nothing to the commitments we have already made.

Earlier this year, I wrote to many of you in order to highlight again the concrete proposals on how transparency and accountability can be improved within the OSCE. I was pleased to receive your responses, which indicated an understanding of the need for improved accountability.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Corfu process, under the excellent stewardship of the Greek Chairmanship, has been a good start in examining where we are. Indeed, I have heard that there is a slight increase in the willingness to engage in actual discussions in Vienna, but I believe that unless dialogue is intensified at the highest political level, these good efforts will lead nowhere. I see many Ministers here today, but it is unfortunate that a number of countries do not find it necessary to devote the time of their leadership to this meeting.

The OSCE is in need of revival. The Parliamentary Assembly has regularly encouraged an increase in high-level political dialogue. I believe that 2010 – as the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charter of Paris – is the appropriate moment to reinvigorate the Organization through the convening of an OSCE Summit during the Kazakh Chairmanship.

For many years now, the Permanent Council has proved unable to come to a single decision that in any substantive way improves upon the existing commitments that we already have. So in preparing a Summit, it would be a mistake to wait to try to reach substantive agreements in Vienna before organizing such a meeting. Had we taken this approach last Spring, I am sure that the Corfu meeting would never have happened. Astana, Helsinki or Paris could all serve as excellent and appropriate locations, but it is clear that the OSCE is in need of a gathering and an open exchange of views at the highest level. Just as the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall reminded us of those important changes, we should seek through a Summit to remind our citizens of the important contribution of the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris.

I thank the Greek Chairmanship for their excellent work, and look forward to continuing our close co-operation with the 2010 Kazakh Chairmanship.

Thank you.