

**Statement by
Ambassador Knut Vollebaek, *Primus inter Pares* of the Panel of Eminent
Persons on Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE.**

OSCE Permanent Council, 30 June 2005

Thank you, Mr Chairman,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first express my gratitude to the Chairman-in-Office, Dr Dimitrij Rupel, for giving me the opportunity to take part in the work of the Panel. It has proven to be a challenging but also very rewarding process. Our allotted time has been short, which can be seen both as a curse and a blessing. With more time, we could have produced a longer and more in-depth analysis of the organisation and its reform needs. On the other hand, the time limit has forced us to produce a report that is short and to-the-point, with concrete and realistic recommendations for reform.

We have held five meetings, in Ljubljana, Vienna, Warsaw and Brussels. We have invited guests from academia, from different parts of the OSCE system, from partner organisations like the EU, the Council of Europe and NATO, as well as from civil society. Although we did not always agree on every point, the atmosphere in the meetings has been both dynamic and constructive. The composition of the group has inspired a collective effort. We have all agreed on the continued importance of the OSCE.

I would like to thank my panel colleagues for the excellent co-operation we have had, and for their dedication and active participation. I would also like to thank the Secretariat for its most valuable support.

Mr Chairman,

You have all had a chance to look at the report. Thus there is no need for me to summarise the recommendations, but I would like to underline some points. The report recognises the need for a clearer focus of the OSCE activities. At the same time the Panel emphasises the need for a cross-dimensional approach in all of the OSCE's activities. The Panel recommends that a guiding principle should be to give priority to those areas where the OSCE can bring added value in relation to other organisations.

The OSCE's value and strength lie in its broad membership, its agreed standards and commitments and its capacities in the field. However, the OSCE does not have the potential to take the lead on all issues. A cross-dimensional approach would therefore mean that in certain areas the Organization should strive to be a catalyst for other international organisations – like the UN, the EU and the international financial institutions. I believe this is particularly true of the work under the Economic and Environmental Dimension.

Mr Chairman,

A streamlining of the structure of the Organization is important in order to achieve more cross-dimensionality and at the same time a clearer focus and coherence. This is why the Panel has suggested establishing three subcommittees under the Permanent Council. I believe this would help to revitalise the political dialogue within all three dimensions.

The Panel recommends a stronger and more visible role for the Secretary General. This would not involve submitting the existing Institutions, Missions and Personal and Special Representatives to the Secretariat. The various entities should continue to operate according to their respective mandates. However, it is important for the OSCE to have the Secretary General as a focal point, with a long-term strategic vision, that retains the institutional memory and represents continuity. This would make it possible to utilise the operational capacities of the OSCE to the full and ensure that all activities under the OSCE banner are coherent and consistent with the priorities of the Permanent Council.

A stronger Secretary General does not imply a weakening of the Chairman-in-Office. The report stresses the important political role of the CiO in creating consensus in the Permanent Council and in handling urgent crises in the OSCE area. However, with the current structure there are several areas where the lines of reporting and responsibility are not clear or well-functioning, which is why we propose a stronger operational leadership by the Secretary General.

The Field Operations have a unique role within the OSCE. They should be further strengthened. Thus, the Panel recommends that all Heads of Missions and Deputy Heads of Mission be employed and paid from the core budget, not seconded. This is not a costly reform according to our assessment. It only requires a two per cent increase in the core budget. However, it would strengthen the institutional ties between the Field Operations and the rest of the Organization.

The Panel is of the opinion that if the OSCE had the status of a legal personality, this would greatly strengthen the effectiveness of the Organization. The Panel

leaves open the choice between a Charter and a Convention. The reason for this is that we realise that agreeing on a Charter could be a time-consuming process, whereas there is already a draft convention that could be finalised if political consensus was achieved.

Mr Chairman,

The Panel also discussed and was briefed on many issues that have not been included in the report. Some of them were politically sensitive, others were found to be too technical for a panel of this kind.

All the panellists agreed that it is important not to lose focus on the unresolved conflicts remaining within the OSCE area. For the OSCE to fulfil its potential in conflict resolution, there has to be a genuine will among the parties involved to utilise the Organization as a political framework and a political tool. In the reform discussion, it is essential to bear in mind that the most important factor in making the Organization more effective is a stronger political will among participating States to utilise the OSCE as a forum for political dialogue and crisis management. Thus the title “Common Purpose”.

Mr Chairman,

We believe that our suggestions would, if implemented, streamline and strengthen the Organization. I trust that the Chairmanship will seize the opportunity this report presents to revitalise the reform discussions and the general interest in the Organization. Time is short before the Ljubljana ministerial, and a lot of work remains to translate the suggestions of the Panel, as well as those from participating States and other institutions, into concrete decisions. Our mandate was to “give new impetus to political dialogue and provide strategic vision for the Organization”. I believe it is important that the follow-up is a highly political process where the Chairmanship utilises its role in creating political consensus through extensive consultations with the 55 participating States.

Mr Chairman,

Let me conclude by saying a few words in commemoration of our colleague Nikolay Afanasievsky, who passed away on 23 June. Through our meetings I came to value him for his knowledge and dedication to the OSCE, as well as his warm hearted hospitality and friendship. He will be deeply missed.

Thank you.