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Victor-Yves Ghebali – An Appreciation

On 6 January 2009, Victor-Yves Ghebali passed away. In him, we have lost by far the most brilliant, knowledgeable, and all-embracing expert on CSCE and OSCE affairs. “Professor Ghebali was Mr. OSCE. His unparalleled memory, understanding and analysis of the Organization’s evolution, mechanisms, institutions and decisions made him a walking encyclopaedia of knowledge that was tapped by officials and researchers alike”, as Walter Kemp, a longstanding OSCE staff member, put it.

In the 1970s, Victor-Yves Ghebali started teaching at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (HEID) in Geneva. In 1990, he was awarded the Chair in International Organizations at HEID. To understand his work, it is necessary to observe that, with the exception of a few brief periods, the CSCE/OSCE has always been massively under-researched. Not, however, by Victor-Yves Ghebali. “He was one of the few serious researchers who set out to study and observe the OSCE and record its evolution”, as the first Secretary General of the CSCE/OSCE, Wilhelm Höynck, noted. The results are well known: A list of Victor-Yves’ publications in 2007’s *Conflicts, security and cooperation, Liber amicorum Victor-Yves Ghebali*, edited by Vincent Chetail, includes 244 written between 1969 and 2007, among them a number of books that have retained their value for decades, particularly *La diplomatie de la détente: La CSCE d’Helsinki a Vienne (1973-1989)*, and *L’OSCE dans l’Europe post-communiste, 1990-1996. Vers une identité paneuropéenne de sécurité*.

His pre-eminence as an analyst of the CSCE/OSCE – he wrote (far) more on this issue than any other researcher – does not at all mean that the OSCE was Victor-Yves’ only object of interest. As his list of publications shows, he also worked intensively on international organizations in general, from the UN system to the International Labour Organization.

Victor-Yves was by no means an ivory-tower type of researcher. He believed in the continuing relevance of the OSCE as a pan-European platform for security co-operation, provided that the Organization is able to defend its normative *acquis* and adapt to changing political circumstances. And he made Geneva into one of the very few centres of academic and political debate on OSCE issues. During the CSCE period, the “neutral and non-aligned” countries played a highly important role, and Switzerland was perhaps the most relevant of them. The Swiss government also remained interested in and committed to the CSCE/OSCE after 1990. Victor-Yves Ghebali, who acted as an adviser to the Swiss government during the 1996 Swiss OSCE Chairmanship, took advantage of this interest to establish the PSIO (Programme for the Study of International Organizations) OSCE Cluster of Competence,

later called the CIG (Centre for International Governance) Focus on the OSCE, a conference held every year in September that brought together prominent OSCE practitioners and researchers. This unique mix of participants resulted in extremely stimulating discussions, not least because Victor-Yves almost always used the opening meeting to provide a thought-provoking (and often provocative) contribution.

For the last ten years, almost since the foundation of the Centre for OSCE Research, there has been a lot of good and close co-operation between Victor-Yves and CORE. Victor-Yves was a very active co-editor of the OSCE Yearbook to which he contributed a number of articles. I myself have participated in each and every one of the Geneva OSCE conferences since the early 2000s and have contributed to the publications that came out of these conferences. And last, but by no means least, Victor-Yves Ghebali participated in the task forces that elaborated the two CORE reports on the future of the OSCE – *Managing Change in Europe* (2005) and *Identifying the Cutting Edge* (2007) – commissioned by the Finnish Foreign Ministry in preparation for Finland's 2008 OSCE Chairmanship.

Victor-Yves was a great scholar, a colleague and partner, but above all, and more and more, he was a friend. In the words of the Secretary General of the OSCE, Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut: "The OSCE has lost a great friend, one whose eyes were always wide open and always among the most perceptive. We shall all be the poorer for no longer being able to rely on his insights." We will not forget how much we have profited from him – in every respect – and will continue to profit from his wealth of insightful writings, in which he shared his unique knowledge so graciously with everyone.