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Ireland's 2012 Chairmanship of the OSCE

The Decision on the Chair

This was the first time that Ireland took on the role of OSCE Chairmanship country; we had not originally sought to be a candidate to take up the helm of political leadership of the Organization, but when it became clear that no other participating State was prepared to come forward, we came under intense pressure and received strong support from other participating States to accept the task. We therefore announced our candidature in November 2009, and the decision was adopted formally at the Athens Ministerial Council the following month. While Ireland has always been a committed participant in the CSCE and then the OSCE, taking on the Chairmanship in 2012 presented a formidable challenge to a small state going through a period of severe recession with consequent pressure on resources.

Despite the challenges and the somewhat less than ideal timing, the Chairmanship was seen as an opportunity for Ireland not only to play a leading and constructive international role but also to demonstrate to our international partners our willingness and ability to take on such a task even at a time of domestic stress. It was an opportunity for Ireland to showcase concretely its longstanding commitment to multilateralism and to live up to its reputation as an "honest broker" on the international stage. The fact that Ireland had chaired the Human Dimension Committee in 2008, on behalf of the Finnish Chairmanship, and the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) in the last trimester of 2010 provided valuable experience in preparing for the Chair.

Once the political decision had been made, the practicalities of carrying out such a role needed to be tackled quickly. The financial constraints on Ireland meant that a lean team had to be put in place both in Dublin and Vienna under the able leadership of Ambassadors Frank Cogan and Eoin O'Leary. The Chair was greatly helped by Ambassadors Tacan İldem, Eustathios Lozos, and Thomas Greminger of Turkey, Greece, and Switzerland, respectively, who chaired the Security, Economic and Environmental, and Human Dimension Committees on behalf of the Chair.

Revitalizing the OSCE: From Corfu to Helsinki +40

What was the state of the OSCE we inherited at the start of our Chairmanship? While apparently fully functioning and intact, the Organization was, and indeed, is, suffering from a number of internal and external stresses. Its

relatively modest core budget (approximately 150 million euros) had been reduced in real terms over recent years, restricting scope for any significant expansion of its activities and necessitating prioritization of existing ones. The OSCE was a major positive force during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and continues, with its strong field presence, to contribute to the overall stability of the region. The Organization still has nearly 70 per cent of its personnel deployed in field missions in areas of past, potential, or protracted conflict, such as Eastern and South-eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. However, the stalemate on conventional arms control, the increasing difficulty in finding a common language and understanding in the human dimension, and the failure to make significant progress on the protracted conflicts in relation to Transdniestria, Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh have severely weakened the Organization.

Indeed, the war in Georgia in August 2008 and its aftermath, including the closure of the OSCE Mission in that country, was a rude awakening for the Organization. It came just a few short months after a new Treaty on European Security was first proposed by then President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia. Both the proposal and the conflict paved the way for a dialogue on the future of European security, launched by the Greek Chairmanship in 2009 under the title “Corfu Process”.

The Corfu Process, which focused on a number of key areas of the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security, including the full implementation of all OSCE norms and commitments, the role of the OSCE in the conflict cycle, arms control and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs), transnational threats, human rights and fundamental freedoms, economic and environmental challenges, and enhancing the OSCE’s effectiveness, in many ways set the tone for the work of the Organization right up to the present day.

The Corfu Process prepared the ground for the OSCE Astana Summit in December 2010, the first meeting of OSCE Heads of State or Government since Istanbul in 1999. Kazakhstan threw down the gauntlet to the participating States, and the vision for the Summit was ambitious, bold, and testing. In addition, the time to prepare was extremely tight. The Summit had the task of translating the discussions that had been held in Corfu into a Declaration by the Heads of State or Government that would identify key threats and challenges in the OSCE region and agreeing a workable action plan for the Organization. This would set the agenda for the coming years and put flesh on the general aspirations and reiterated values set out in the Declaration. Ultimately, the goal of an agreed action plan proved a bridge too far, although the Summit outcome document, the Astana Commemorative Declaration, contains some crucially important elements, such as a solid reaffirmation by the participating States, at the highest level, of “full adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and to all OSCE norms, principles and commitments [...] and our responsibility to implement them fully and in good faith”, and

the determination “to work together to fully realize the vision of a comprehensive, co-operative and indivisible security community throughout our shared OSCE area”.¹

Another important element was the tasking of incoming Chairmanships with developing a concrete action plan for the Organization. The Lithuanian Chairmanship in 2011 sought to bring the tasking from Astana forward by developing the so-called V to V Dialogues (Vancouver to Vladivostok via Vienna and Vilnius). This series of meetings at ambassadorial level aimed to build on the discussions in Corfu by identifying small but meaningful steps forward and led to useful progress and deliverables in a number of areas at the Vilnius Ministerial Council.

The Irish Chair built on the V to V Dialogues by launching the “Helsinki +40 Process” at the Dublin Ministerial the following year. However, the seeds to capitalize on the upcoming 40th anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 2015, not simply as a moment of commemoration, but as a genuine opportunity to achieve real progress within a multi-year perspective, were planted from the beginning of our Chairmanship. As any participating State that has held the Chairmanship will tell you, twelve months is a very short time in which to achieve real progress. Ambition needs to be tempered with political realities and the knowledge that you will undoubtedly face unforeseen challenges or crises. Therefore, from an early stage in our Chairmanship we were clear in our intention to focus the minds of the participating States on efforts to rebuild confidence in the “comprehensive” security approach of the OSCE. This was a formidable task in the light of a clear divergence of views on some fundamental issues, notably in relation to the overall security architecture, and the growing divergences in relation to priorities and practice in relation to human rights and respect for democratic rules and practices. A core objective was the passing of a decision at the Dublin Ministerial Council setting out a clear path from now until 2015, the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, as a framework for strengthening the work of the Organization and the renewal of the Helsinki principles. The overall idea of the Helsinki +40 Process is to raise the level of the debate in the Organization from the day to day to the more strategic, taking advantage of the unusual but happy circumstance that the Chairs of the Organization up to 2015 are already known. In so doing, we aimed to address the challenge given in the Astana Declaration to the Chairs of the OSCE to develop an action plan for the Organization.

Much of our work during the year was aimed at obtaining the endorsement of the participating States at the Dublin Ministerial Council for this framework. Over the year, we worked in close consultation with Lithuania and the three incoming Chairs up to 2015 – Ukraine, Switzerland, and Serbia

1 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Summit Meeting, Astana 2010, *Astana Commemorative Declaration. Towards a Security Community*, SUM.DOC/1/10, 3 December 2010, paras 2 and 11.

– to develop possible models for it. We were extremely pleased that consensus was reached at the Dublin Ministerial on a decision on this important task. In the days leading up to the Dublin Ministerial, intensive negotiating efforts were led by our Permanent Representative in Vienna, Ambassador O’Leary, and his team to finalize the document, but it was proving difficult to overcome divergences on the scope and length of the text. That it proved possible to reach final agreement was due in no small measure to the personal intervention and skill of Ireland’s Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and *Tánaiste* (Deputy Prime Minister), Eamon Gilmore, who brought the text of the decision to his Ministerial colleagues at the working lunch on the first day of the Ministerial Meeting, and secured their agreement to it. The final text was shorter than the Chair would have desired but met the key criterion of setting out a clear tasking to the Organization and its participating States.

Maintaining and Renewing

Helsinki +40 was, of course, only one task facing the Irish Chair. In addition we had to manage a complex and varied agenda across all dimensions of the Organization’s work.

While progress had been made on issues such as the conflict cycle, and on co-operation with the partner states during 2011, the closure of the OSCE presence in Belarus, the failure to find common language in the human dimension at the Vilnius Ministerial Council and the weakening of the “reset” in relations between the USA and the Russian Federation, especially in the period between the Russian presidential elections and the US presidential elections, combined with the falling into decay of the CFE Treaty over the recent past did not create the most auspicious atmosphere for the Irish Chair.

When the new Chairperson-in-Office presented Ireland’s priorities to the Permanent Council on 12 January 2012, he stressed, therefore, that in our approach as Chair, we would rely on our longstanding conviction that a truly comprehensive approach to security can only be achieved if all three baskets of the OSCE’s work in the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions are considered parts of a single and integrated whole. That being said, the Chair realized that a “building-blocks” approach that focused on defined achievable objectives was the only feasible one to take. Over the year, Ireland focused on a small number of key achievables. In doing so, we were careful to adopt and project an attitude of balance and fairness to all sides. Even though we were to assume the Presidency of the EU on the day we handed over the Chair of the OSCE to Ukraine, we were determined to be seen as a Chair for the OSCE as a whole and believe that we succeeded in gaining the trust of all sides. The key challenges that faced us can be summarized under the following headings.

Protracted Conflicts

While being realistic in not underestimating the complexities involved in dealing with these conflicts, Ireland felt it could bring some fresh thinking, drawing on our national experience, to the various talks processes that have been created to resolve these conflicts. While recognizing that there is no single blueprint or model that can be applied to different conflicts, we drew from our own positive experience with the Northern Ireland peace process.

In April, a Chairmanship conference took place in Dublin on lessons learned in the Northern Ireland peace process in the field of conflict resolution and reconciliation. Former President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland chaired the conference, whose main contributors included US Senator George Mitchell, the veteran peace mediator who had played a pivotal role in the negotiations leading up to the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements that copper-fastened the Northern Ireland settlement. A notable feature of the conference was the appearance, sitting side-by-side, of former bitter political opponents – Peter Robinson, First Minister, and Martin McGuinness, Deputy First Minister, of the Northern Ireland Executive – who spoke extremely eloquently of the ongoing co-operation between former adversaries in making the peace agreements work in practice.

As regards the practicalities of the protracted conflicts where the Chairmanship has a role, the prospects for progress were markedly different. The “5+2” talks, which aimed at achieving a settlement on Transdniestria, offered the best prospects. Ireland was fortunate to have the services of a very astute Special Representative: former EU Ambassador Erwan Fouéré. We were also fortunate in that, towards the end of the Lithuanian Chairmanship in 2011, the formal talks that had been suspended since 2006 were resumed. Five rounds of discussions, including two in Ireland, produced agreement on important building blocks for a future settlement, including an agenda for the negotiating process, and agreed principles and procedures for the negotiations. Other positive developments included the resumption of freight traffic through Transdniestria and agreement on a civil society forum to accompany the formal talks. In the wider OSCE context, we were very satisfied with the adoption by the Ministerial Council in Dublin of an agreed declaration on the 5+2 process, which acknowledged the progress achieved. This was the first such statement adopted since 2002 and the first ever adopted since the broadening of the format to 5+2. The fact that such a statement could be agreed in the absence of the agreement of a general political declaration by ministers was particularly noteworthy.

The protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus were dealt with by another Special Representative, the very able former Irish Ambassador Pádraig Murphy. We were able to note some excellent work by the participants in the Geneva discussions, established following the 2008 war in Georgia, although progress was not as concrete as we would have liked. However, very sub-

stantial progress was made on the ground where the meetings of the Ergneti/Dvani Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) proceeded smoothly and productively, and new projects to address the needs of the local population, be they in facilitating agriculture or providing water, were agreed. The failure of the Gali IPRM to meet was a disappointment, and the Irish Chairmanship provided all possible support to UN efforts to resume meetings.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict proved a more difficult proposition. While we strongly supported the efforts of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs and Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on the conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference, and while this support was reiterated strongly in the course of a visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Georgia, by Minister Gilmore in June, there was little progress to note. This was due to factors outside our control, including the calendar of elections in the key Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, as well as impending elections in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the pardoning by Azerbaijan of a military officer convicted of murdering an Armenian soldier during a NATO training course, and the announcement by Armenia that it would begin making flights into the airport in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Elections in Kosovo

Perhaps the most important achievement of Ireland's Chairmanship was the brokering of an agreement whereby the OSCE facilitated the voting of Serbian citizens resident in Kosovo for the Serbian president and parliament. This required intensive work over the weeks leading up to the elections, and the personal intervention of the *Tánaiste*, supported by the Secretary General, proved critical in obtaining the agreement of the Serbian authorities. The fact that the elections proceeded without difficulty, even though agreement was reached less than a week before the first round of voting, was a tribute to the flexibility and effectiveness of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and the other OSCE missions in the region, which also assisted. This was a clear example of conflict prevention in action and is one of which the Irish Chair is justly proud. This was one of the occasions on which, despite the negative and somewhat jaded attitudes often encountered in OSCE affairs, it is possible to demonstrate that the spirit and the principles of Helsinki are still alive and can be adduced as directly to the benefit of the citizens.

Welcoming Mongolia

We were very happy to welcome in Dublin the formal accession of Mongolia as a new participating State. Securing agreement to Mongolia's accession involved a joint visit to Mongolia by Secretary General Lamberto Zannier and Ambassador O'Leary, supported by a team of experts. This visit enabled the Irish Chair to propose a solid basis for Mongolia's accession. Achieving agreement on this however, was not as easy as it might seem, as some participating States had reservations regarding the precedent that the admission of a state from outside the traditional boundaries of the OSCE region might set. In addition, as happens all too often in the OSCE, when it seemed as if agreement had been reached, unforeseen difficulties arose in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the end, all the participating States came on board, and the admission of Mongolia to the table was warmly welcomed by all in Dublin.

The decision to admit Mongolia, and, indeed, Mongolia's own desire to join the OSCE, provides an important fillip for the Organization at a difficult time. That the Organization is attractive to a new member, willing to take on the demanding *acquis*, norms, and commitments that becoming a participating State entails, demonstrates both to existing states and to outsiders that the OSCE remains an inclusive and co-operative power and a valuable part of the overall European security architecture. It reinforced that the Organization continues to play a significant role in conflict resolution and in the promotion of peace, security, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Provoking Thought: Providing New Thinking

The Irish Chair was determined, where possible, to challenge the conventional wisdom and to provoke new thinking. The long-running issue of the legal status of the Organization was given a new impetus thanks to the excellent work of former Danish Ambassador John Bernhard. The Chair set out the issues in a succinct but comprehensive updated report and developed a number of innovative proposals. While progress remains to be made on this issue, the work of the Irish Chair provides a basis for further efforts when the political climate improves.

The question of relations between the OSCE and other international organizations, on which another excellent report was prepared on behalf of the Chair by the former head of the EU Delegation Ambassador Lars-Erik Lundin, was another area where the Irish Chair challenged the Organization to think anew. The Lundin Report was shared with partner organizations and will remain a road map for further progress in this area at a time when the demand from all sides for increased efficiency and co-operation continues to grow.

Managing the Agenda

In the first or politico-military dimension, the Chair is responsible for the Security Committee, which deals largely with non-military aspects of politico-military security. We were pleased that it was possible to reach agreement in the course of the year on a package of measures on combating transnational threats, which was endorsed by the ministers in Dublin. This body of work, which sets out strategic priorities for the Organization in the area of combating transnational threats relating to cyber-security, combating illicit drugs, countering terrorism, and policing, had been in preparation since the Corfu Process, and the adoption of these measures by the Permanent Council and their subsequent endorsement by the ministers underpinned the value of the “building-blocks” approach that the Irish Chairmanship had been promoting. Now, in the words of the ministers, must begin the hard work of their “full operationalization and integration into the activities of the Organization with the aim of translating political commitments agreed by the participating States into effective and sustainable programmatic action”.²

We also noted considerable progress towards an agreement on a first set of confidence-building measures in the area of cyber-security and the security of information and communications technology (ICT) generally, though a formal decision on that could not command consensus support. Progress was also noted on work in the FSC in updating the Vienna Document and on control of small arms, though regrettably consensus was absent on a formal endorsement of this progress, despite Herculean efforts in the final hours by the then current and incoming FSC Chairmanships.

In the economic and environmental dimension, we highlighted the issue of good governance and its importance for comprehensive security for citizens in the OSCE region. This theme was the focus of the Economic and Environmental Forum during 2012. At the Dublin Ministerial Council, a Declaration on Good Governance, which affirmed the intention of the OSCE states to deepen their engagement to combat and prevent corruption, was adopted by consensus. Critically, at the core of this declaration of support for promoting good governance and transparency is the reaffirmation that the rule of law and respect for human rights are central to creating a climate of confidence necessary for positive economic and social development. The declaration also calls for strengthening the dialogue and co-operation between governments, civil society, and the private sector in order to support good-governance efforts. Furthermore, it acknowledges the role that freedom of information and access to information play in fostering openness and accountability. More specifically, the declaration recognizes the need to enhance the implementation of anti-corruption commitments by involving civil

2 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Dublin 2012, *Decision No. 4/12, OSCE's Efforts to Address Transnational Threats*, MC.DEC/4/12, 7 December 2012.

society and business, including through the mechanism for the review of the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption.

This was another substantial achievement for the Irish Chairmanship, and it continues to serve as a starting point for discussions on good governance in the second dimension.

In the human dimension, from the outset we clearly indicated our priority attachment to freedom of the media, in particular internet freedom. Other priorities were also identified, such as tolerance, combating racism and xenophobia, and freedom of assembly. In our programme, we benefitted from the assistance of an international team of four excellent representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office for combating religious intolerance, discrimination, racism, and xenophobia (including a former Judge of the Irish Supreme Court, Judge Catherine McGuinness). However, the human dimension proved to be the most problematic of all areas for the Chairmanship, due to an underlying significant divergence over what is meant by fundamental rights and democratic principles in today's world.

Our main priority, internet freedom, was the subject of a very successful and rather innovative conference in Dublin in June, which featured interactive participation of both governmental and civil society representatives – including online participants. This we regarded as one of the highlights of our Chairmanship – not merely for the content of the conference but for its open, transparent style and active embracing of modern means of mass communication, especially in the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogging, etc). In order to do this we had to tread on a few toes – some of the more traditional-minded delegates were rather disconcerted that we favoured inclusive and interactive panel-type discussions and discouraged set-piece formal delegation statements – but we felt it was a useful means of trying to engage participants in facing up to the realities of twenty-first century political communication and debate. The online debate received attention across a wide online audience and during the day it was reported to be “trending” on Twitter internationally.

We prepared a very balanced package of decisions for the Dublin Ministerial, following exhaustive consultations and discussions in Vienna. Despite this, it was not possible to reach consensus on any of the texts proposed in the human dimension. Right through the year, the third dimension was the most problematic area in the management of our Chairmanship business, despite the fact that it was probably the area in which we deployed more diplomatic effort than any other; in fact, enormous numbers of hours were devoted by both our small but dedicated Vienna and Dublin-based teams in trying to find a way through the tangle of conflicting positions and in ceaseless efforts to try to broker agreement between the main parties. Even getting to first base, as it were, was difficult.

In the opening months, agreement on our annual work programme in this dimension was held up for several weeks due to the bargaining attempts

by some states to obtain concessions not only on the content of the programme but on other fronts, principally in trying to force through “reforms” of the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting organized by ODIHR. We did, as it transpired, put forward a package for reviewing human-dimension events, and were grateful for the assistance afforded by a very useful Swiss-funded consultants’ study, but no agreement on our proposal was forthcoming. We remain of the view that this package is well balanced and, if implemented, would serve as a very valuable contribution to improving the functioning and impact of OSCE human dimension events.

As this was the second year in succession in which no decisions had been agreed in the human dimension, this was acknowledged as a disappointing outcome and a sign of a worrying trend by the Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Gilmore, in his closing speech at the Ministerial Council meeting and at the subsequent press conference; he noted “the sad reality that respect for basic human rights and fundamental freedoms is currently under great threat in many parts of the OSCE region”.³ Elsewhere, Minister Gilmore has noted that “if we are being true to our comprehensive approach to security we cannot let human rights and human security fall victim to disagreement”.⁴ There was, however, considerable satisfaction for many in that a Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age was signed by over 48 delegations, including Ireland, by the conclusion of the Ministerial Council.

A Subjective Assessment

Overall, then, how do we think we did? The OSCE Chairmanship is a complex task, and one would be foolish to expect easy or dramatic breakthroughs in an organization in which there are significant divisions and where all decisions are taken by consensus. We can, however, look back on a generally positive experience in a year that saw some real progress. As we had set out in our Priorities for Action document at the very beginning of 2012, our overarching goal for the Chairmanship was to strengthen security across all dimensions of the OSCE and to enhance the Organization’s capacity to fulfil its fundamental objectives. Our assessment is that we left the Organization stronger than we found it, with a clear perspective for the next three years ahead. As the Chairperson-in-Office remarked in his closing speech at the end of the Dublin Ministerial Council on 7 December, “We can be satisfied that the Organization has emerged strengthened from the decisions we have

3 *Closing Statement by Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, Eamon Gilmore TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland, 19th OSCE Ministerial Council, Dublin, 7 December 2012, MC.DEL/54/12, 7 December 2012.*

4 Eamon Gilmore, Strengthening good governance and human rights, in: *New Europe*, 17 December 2012, at: <http://www.neurope.eu/kn/article/strengthening-good-governance-and-human-rights>.

made in Dublin” and “I am happy that we have renewed our determination to work together on many key issues, to the benefit of our citizens”.⁵

The adoption of the Helsinki +40 framework decision represents an important opportunity for the OSCE to re-examine its role and rededicate itself and its membership to those ideals, which are self-evidently worth striving to achieve. We will continue to take an active interest in the progress of this initiative, building on the good rapport we have already built up with the next three Chairmanships, those of Ukraine, Switzerland, and Serbia.

5 *Closing Statement by the Chairperson-in-Office*, cited above (Note 3).