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## Preface

This consecutive edition of the OSCE Yearbook has rolled off the printing presses at a time when the attention of Europe is focused on finding a solution to the Kosovo crisis and preventing it from spilling over to the entire region, with knock-on effects for the entire European continent.

This is a momentous challenge for the OSCE, which must not only find a solution to the conflict but also prove irrefutably that Europe can overcome the balance-of-power system that has ruled supreme throughout the modern history of our continent. In other words, an ideally remodelled Europe would not rely for its security on a balance of power, but would rest on the firm footing provided by a system of reciprocated, self-imposed restraints, checks and balances, co-operation and international organizations performing complementary functions. This is not an easy goal but we must pool our efforts and embark upon the task of bringing it about.

The Kosovo conflict has now hotted up and become the focal point of international attention, which is only natural. In the vast area covered by the OSCE participating States, extending from Vancouver to Vladivostok, all kinds of challenges and dangerous situations keep cropping up that call for an early-warning and conflict-prevention system. For nobody can claim to be free of the threat of danger today. During my recent visit to Central Asia, I could see for myself that terrorism, ideological and religious fundamentalism, drug smuggling and threats to the natural environment are our common cause. We must jointly face these challenges, while heeding the English proverb that "prevention is better than cure".

Democracy these days no longer needs military guarantees to make it feel secure. However, we must all redouble our efforts to protect it and have confidence that the values and standards we have embraced and cherish are still securely in place. We must also be on the alert for dangers fuelled by the low living standards prevailing in many countries and the need to usher in what are often painful economic reforms to remedy the situation there. This calls for a heightened responsiveness on the part of all the OSCE participating States to the plight of their partners, translated into broad co-operation and mutual assistance.

Last spring in Vienna saw the inauguration of work on a European Security Charter, which should be adopted by the OSCE Summit in the autumn of 1999. This work, incidentally, is no mere exercise in intellectual sophistication, as the game now unfolding is for a set of principles that would govern an efficient system of mutually supportive European security institutions,

consistent in their efforts to provide solutions to conflicts. The Charter will define the OSCE's role in this system and will possibly at long last banish from our lives the balance-of-power concept, putting in its place a new set of principles of co-operative security.

The year 1998 is a time of coming to grips with challenges, of laying the corner-stones of co-operative security, and of staking out the avenues towards the democratic coexistence of states in our continent. These were the tasks for the Polish chairmanship of the OSCE in 1998.