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Preface

Nineteen ninety-nine has been the most challenging year in the history of the OSCE so far. It has been the year of our largest field mission to date, and it has been the year of one of the worst human catastrophes that the OSCE and the rest of the international community have ever faced. The Kosovo crisis has exceeded our worst fears with regard to ethnic cleansing and brutality. The media brings us fresh evidence every day of the atrocities suffered by the Kosovar Albanian people. The OSCE and other international organizations mandated to deal with the crisis failed to contain it. But this was mainly due to a political leadership in Belgrade which openly, deliberately and blatantly abused OSCE commitments and other important values that govern the international community. The Kosovo operation once more showed that the OSCE can help and advise parties who want to resolve conflicts, but the Organization has neither the mandate nor the equipment needed to impose solutions.

The OSCE is a lean and cost-effective organization. The Secretariat employs only about 150 people. But even though it is so small, and relies on active support from its participating States, it has proven its ability to rise to the challenges facing it, and to react with dynamism and vigour when called upon. The deployment of the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) last autumn was the biggest field operation ever launched by the OSCE. The operation showed that the OSCE is a flexible organization, able to take on complex and urgent tasks. I have tremendous respect for the men and women who joined the KVM at short notice, and who worked under very difficult political and physical conditions in Kosovo, until we were forced to withdraw the Mission. I can assure you that the OSCE is ready to take on a substantial responsibility for the civilian implementation of a political settlement for Kosovo.

The Kosovo crisis is not the only situation we are dealing with in the OSCE, but it is a reminder that failure to prevent conflict is what creates headlines. The person responsible for the Kosovo crisis is of course Mr. Milošević, and not the OSCE. My point is that successful long-term conflict prevention and crisis management tend to be focused upon less, and one is not as familiar with them. I would therefore like to mention some of the success stories of the OSCE. These are stories that have not received much coverage in the international press, but they are significant because they have contributed to European security and stability.

The Baltic area is not an area of instability and crisis. Its transformation and adaptation after the fall of the Soviet Union have become a European success story. This is of course mainly due to the policies and efforts of the countries in question, but one should not underestimate the significance of the OSCE's contribution to the integration of the linguistic minorities in Estonia and Latvia. This integration has been a prerequisite for the stability that now prevails in the sub-region. The OSCE was also politically useful to the Baltic states and to Russia with regard to the military stabilization of the area following the 1992 Summit in Helsinki. The shut-down of the Skrunda Radar Station in August 1998 was the latest successful step in this regard.

The post-conflict rehabilitation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is another challenging task. I feel that the future prospects of this country are improving by small but significant steps. It is not easy to build a democracy based on the rule of law in a war-torn country in which ethnic groups that have fought one another are forced to live together. But I believe that we will succeed over time in making democratic institutions work. The time has not yet come for us to hand over all political responsibility to the leaders and institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. But as the new political order of the country matures, we are approaching that date.

Central Asia is a region in which the OSCE is stepping up its commitment. The Organization is a vital link between Central Asia and Europe, and we have already intensified our level of activity in the five states by establishing OSCE Centres in all of them. The Oslo Ministerial Council has asked me to present a report on Central Asia before the summer, and I have appointed one of Germany's top diplomats, Ambassador Wilhelm Höynck, former Secretary General of the OSCE, as a Special Representative of the Chairman-in-Office to prepare the report.

The Southern Caucasus is another sub-region in a situation comparable to that of Central Asia. The difference is that the OSCE has for some time had an important role to play with regard to conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation. Some of the conflicts in this area appear to be "frozen", such as Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia. But progress is being made, in South Ossetia for example. We hope to add further to the long-term stabilization of the sub-region by opening OSCE Offices in Baku and Yerevan in 1999.

As Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, I will continue to do my best to lead the OSCE in a way that benefits the entire Organization and enables it to perform the vital and varied tasks assigned to it.