



SPEECH

by OSCE Chairman-in-Office Dr. Dimitrij Rupel
at Chatham House

"Promoting Democracy in Central Asia"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Honorable guests, dear friends,

Let me first thank the **Royal Institute for International Affairs**, particularly, **Sir John** (Birch) for their hospitality and welcome. I am delighted to be here at the Chatham House, and to have the opportunity to make some personal reflections on my work as Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

I don't just say this; I truly believe in the added value of this organization, and the positive difference it has made and continues to make in areas of human rights, economic prosperity, and security. The OSCE has received a great deal of attention recently, partly for good reasons like election monitoring in Ukraine and crisis management in Kyrgyzstan.

I want to talk to you today about promoting and **strengthening democratic governance in Central Asia.**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I do so, let me say a few words about the work **the OSCE has been doing in the Western Balkans**, a region much closer to Slovenia. The OSCE has field missions in all the Western Balkan states; our biggest is in Kosovo. The OSCE has been providing on ground assistance in police training; we have been working with the local authorities on

minority protection programs; we have been developing educational capacity; we help with law reforms and law implementation, court supervision, etc.

I'm at this point, a little skeptical however as to the future of the region in as far as the Euro-Atlantic context is concerned. This apocalypse of introversion which seems to be daunting upon the EU leaves little room for enlargement.

Undoubtedly **enlargement** has always been a net added value for the development of both EU's internal and external processes. At the same time, it is important to outline the positive correlation between enlargement and political and economic reforms. EU membership must remain on offer for the Balkan states – and let me also say for Turkey – if democratic progress and economic transition are to continue in the region. I agree, it is time we take another look at enlargement policy as a whole and perhaps reform it, but I caution against indefinite postponement.

Dear colleagues,

The case for democracy is not only moral, it is also practical. As Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said recently at a forum similar to this one, democracies don't fight each other and people who have a direct say in their future are less likely to turn to extremes, to hatred and violence.

Let me stress a particularly point here: **Democracy is the fundamental base for long-term stability and economic prosperity.** While it is not necessarily a precondition for economic growth – as there are many non-democratic states which are considerably wealthy – democracy is the best long-term insurance policy for stability and prosperity.

Strong governance, ladies and gentlemen, is no substitute for **good governance.** Indeed, history shows that most authoritarian states become failed states. Democratic values are still too often and too readily sacrificed in our own community of member states in the name of short-term stability.

I find this last part particularly worrying as it suggests a profound misunderstanding of the correlation between a strong government and a stable and functioning state. I don't believe that high centralization of power is stable. History in fact, teaches differently.

Of course good governance is based on a range of factors that require time, expertise and popular engagement. These can not be developed overnight, but good governance skills can be acquired and learned. At the same time good governance cannot grow where there is no oxygen for democracy.

Francis Fukuyama, makes a very important distinction between the scope of state activities and the strength of governments. The scope, according to Fukuyama consists of the different functions and goals taken on by the state, whereas state strength is the ability to plan and execute state power lawfully, responsibly, and transparently. In other words state strength means institutional capacity. In other words, a strong state is not necessarily one with the biggest bureaucracy, but one with the greatest democratic legitimacy and the capacity to protect this democracy.

As we reflect on the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, we should recall the **importance human rights have on security**. The principles of the Final Act that concerned respect for human rights became a beacon for dissidents across the Soviet Union and the Communist block. The powerless became empowered by holding their governments accountable for the commitments agreed to at Helsinki.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In a world where security is indivisible, we – especially in Europe – have a vested interest in stability, democracy and prosperity in Central Asia. I submit that it is time for a

Central Asia Democracy project.

In the 1980's I was involved in a **Central Europe Democracy Project**.

The roots of democracy in Central Asia are weak, while their historic experience is different than ours. We need to support democratization in these states in order to provide the basis for sustainable development and civil society. Political power in Central Asian is still highly centralized, with corruption and abuse prevalent throughout the political and social structures.

The problem is indeed urgent. Central Asian states are generally weak, one could argue on the verge of failing. The number of individuals living below poverty line in Central Asia is close to 50 percent. Economic development for the most part is unsatisfactory, with production sectors functioning poorly. The small-and-medium size enterprise sectors are underdeveloped, while the human capacity, infrastructure, and the productivity yields are extremely low.

At the same time, we can hardly be satisfied with the state of human rights in Central Asia, and the nature and structure of human security. The level of individual freedoms – like freedom of the media and expression – is low.

These are not bumper-sticker proclamations; quite the contrary. Low economic variability and lack of democratic stability and functioning security are making Central Asia highly unpredictable, and possibly a safe-haven for international terrorists. By overlooking the problems there, we are undermining our own efforts to bring lasting stability and security to the Middle East. The two regions are linked and co-exist in many respects.

Dear friends,

In order to preserve a general sense of stability and control over the process of transition in Central Asia, we must be working on tackling the problem of democratic deficit in

the region now. The pressure is mounting as witnessed by the recent revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the violence in Uzbekistan.

Let me divert here, and for a moment address the **present situation in Uzbekistan**. Although I have been in contact with the government in Uzbekistan, I cannot say for certain what happened during the brief period of violence. The lesson though, I think is becoming increasingly clear. There will be no lasting stability in Uzbekistan as long as the government in Tashkent refuses to fully embrace reforms and accepts the concept of power sharing. Political plurality and power sharing are two instrumental guarantees for long-term prosperity and sustainable economic and social development.

At this point let me say that it is essential to **have an independent investigation (not one with the members of local embassies)** into what happened in Andijan. I strongly urge the government in Tashkent to cooperate, and I remind that we are a community of shared values, responsibilities, and standards. Transparency is a standard we cannot negotiate on.

At the beginning there was a lack of support to have an international inquiry into the Andijan case. This reminds of an extremely archaic application of the concept of national sovereignty and security. Those who maintain their distance from international commitments strengthen their isolation from the international community.

In the age of globalization, neither national sovereignty, nor national security is an absolute. The concept of borders is being changed given our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. So too, our concept of security must adjust, and we are bound to be concerned and troubled by zones of high instability – even if these are outside our national borders. Further, as individual and groups gain the power and capacity to inflict mass damage, and given the proliferation and well organized smuggling channels, it is absolutely essential for us to pay attention to regions and areas where the traditional state structures are handicapped in one way or another, and where the national governments are in many respects incapable of providing broad security.

The security realities of the 21st Century are forcing us to pay attention to extreme poverty even in places as distant as Africa – an issue which I know is close to the heart of your Prime Minister. We can no longer afford to remain complacent in the face of excessive corruption, lack of transparency and political accountability. For this reason, what happened in Andijan is very much an international concern.

Friends,

The Central Asia Democracy project is a necessary step which can bring prosperity and security to the region, and the international system as a whole. Zbig Brzezinski referred to Central Asia as a priceless “commodity” in the world of geopolitical competition. To an extent, the geopolitical competition in Central Asia continues. After all, much is at stake in the region. But the human rights of the people of Central Asia should not be the casualty of a new Great Game.

Let me be clear, **democracy is not an overnight process**. We too often learned this lesson, I think, the hard way. Nor should democracy be about replacing one set of authoritarian and corrupt figures with another. Democracy is not the individual in power, or any particular government. Democracy is a process and a community of shared values. And a stable democracy offers the possibility for alteration in power without endangering the fundamental freedoms, rights, and well-being of citizens.

As such, it is important that we build no illusions about what we can achieve in Central Asia in the short-run. The process of democratic transition in this region will not go the way of Ukraine. The progression curve will be slower. Still, it is about time that the people of Central Asia won our attention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude by coming back to the point I made at the very beginning of my short presentation: **The OSCE is still relevant today, perhaps more so than ever**, precisely because it is best positioned to coordinate the democratic capacity building initiative in Central Asia.

The Presidential election in Kyrgyzstan is scheduled for July 10. I hope for the best, but we must prepare ourselves for the worst. Let's also remember that this is not the end-point of democracy building in the region. Rather, Kyrgyzstan is in a way a platform on which we can begin building and transforming the region into a zone of stability, security and economic prosperity, underwritten by the principles of democratic governance.

Today's challenges in Central Asia require a new and reinvigorated alliance between the various international and regional structures, and I'm determined to use the remainder of Slovenia's Chairmanship to push forward what I have described here today as the Central Asia Democracy project.

Thank you!