

1) You visited Kiev as the OSCE Chairman-in-Office at the beginning of the year. Ukraine will soon mark the first anniversary of the »orange revolution«. The whole world acknowledges democratic changes that have been made. How much has in your eyes Ukraine changed during this time?

This is my third visit to Ukraine since I took over the Chairmanship of the OSCE. The repeat presidential election in Ukraine in December 2004 was a victory for democracy and the rule of law. The lively political discourse, the peaceful demonstrations, and the role of the Supreme Court demonstrated a healthy democratic environment in Ukraine.

Ukraine has made an important step forward in the past ten months. I believe it is necessary to maintain this momentum to further strengthen the development of democracy and stability in the country. The OSCE attaches great importance to this process and is ready to give further support.

We hope to continue the important work being done by the Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator, as long as it is necessary. I believe our Organisation can further assist Ukraine on various issues, such as election assistance, freedom of the media, education, fighting human trafficking, protecting national minorities, strengthening border security, disposing of ammunition and small arms stockpiles, and economic dimension activities.

2) Are there any warnings within/from the OSCE regarding the upcoming parliamentary elections in Ukraine?

The OSCE is trying to help Ukraine. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator country's administration in improving the voter registration and technical election procedures. I appreciate the fact that the new parliamentary election law took into consideration a significant number of recommendations made by OSCE/ODIHR after the presidential election. The ODIHR intends to send a Needs Assessment Mission by the end of the year to assess the state of preparations for the elections and advise on the modalities of the Election Observation Mission.

As I said before, Ukraine must uphold the democratic ideals and expectations expressed last winter. In this regard, I believe it is crucial that those involved in the violations that marred the last election be duly prosecuted in accordance with the law. The OSCE sees the upcoming parliamentary elections in March 2006 as an opportunity for Ukraine's leadership to consolidate its commitment to democracy and the rule of law. I am confident that Ukraine will manage these elections in a transparent, fair and free manner.

3) Ukraine's persistence has resulted in renewing the negotiations process between Chisinau and Tiraspol on the Transdnestrian issue after a long halt. Do you see President Yushchenko's plan as the most acceptable one on the path to the final settlement of the problem? Does the new Russian plan represent a new obstacle in this process?

I believe that fresh impetus should be given to the process of finding a lasting solution for the Transdnestrian question. The OSCE remains committed to finding a peaceful political

settlement and the Slovenian Chairmanship has so far devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to this end. My visits to Russia, Moldova and Ukraine, as well as the meeting of mediators – with the EU and US as observers – this week in Ljubljana are steps in this direction. We hope that the negotiation process, scheduled to resume at the end of this month in the expanded “5+2” format, will be another positive step.

The recently renewed interest from all of the involved sides, including Russia, is an opportunity to move the process of negotiations forward, after they were stalled for a considerable period of time. Ukraine’s role, as well as President Yushchenko’s active engagement, is highly appreciated.

4) The OSCE is also involved in the issue of withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia and Moldova. What is the current progress here?

I welcome the progress made in terms of the withdrawal of troops and material from Russian bases on the territory of Georgia. I also welcome the intention of the two countries to soon sign an agreement on the details of the withdrawal operation, as foreseen in the Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and Georgia made during the OSCE Summit in Istanbul on 17 November 1999 and in the joint declaration of the Russian and Georgian Foreign Ministers on 30 May 2005. The OSCE is prepared to provide assistance in creating the conditions for the withdrawal of the Russian forces from the country.

However, progress on that same concern in Moldova has been suspended for some time. We hope that the recent new dynamics injected into the Transdniestrian settlement process will provide some advances in the area of withdrawal.

5) Many Ukrainians would like to know about the readiness of Moscow to resolve a similar issue of Black Sea fleet stationed at the Crimea, due to withdraw from there by 2017?

This is a bilateral issue between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, for which the OSCE has neither the mandate nor has it been requested to participate.

6) The OSCE is one of the forerunners in human rights protection. Calls for reform of the OSCE are more and more frequently voiced? What are the basic problems of the OSCE? What changes should be made?

Of course the OSCE has a problem. The changed security situation in the OSCE region has lately given ground for calls for reforms of the Organization. Other international organizations face similar developments. The Slovenian Chairmanship has been focusing on this question of reform for the best part of the year. The Panel of Eminent Persons which I appointed at the beginning of the year, has produced a set of proposals for reform. These proposals were examined by the OSCE participating States at High-Level Consultations last month. Currently, a working group is continuing these efforts and we expect that it will develop a number of concrete decisions that will be put forward to the Ministerial Council in December. These are likely to focus on the internal structure of the OSCE. I am confident that the decisions will further improve the effectiveness of the Organization and enable it to better face the challenges of the changed security environment. Nonetheless I am certain that the question of OSCE reform will still be occupying the next Chairmanship, as this is a long-term process.