

The Ljubljana Ministerial Conference was in many ways a huge success. It was an opportunity to review the progress made over the course of the year, and with 22 decisions passed, an ambitious agenda was set for the future. 2005 also marked the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, and it goes without saying, the OSCE community has achieved much in this period. The Berlin Wall fell, and Europe moved many steps closer to being united, whole and free.

Despite having reason to celebrate much work remains to be done. Western Balkans remains a major challenge, and an area which can quickly tip into instability. Kosovo final status and Bosnia's constitutional transition are now at the forefront of international attention. Despite failing to pass a resolution on Kosovo at the Ljubljana Ministerial, Slovenia's year-long effort in the region helped ensure that the OSCE remains an important partner in the process of broadening stability and enhancing institutional capacity in the region.

To write off the OSCE from the Balkans at this crucial time of transition would be a mistake. The Organization has proved flexible in terms of being able to adjust to changing circumstances, and continues to add value. The OSCE for example runs the police training in Kosovo, and is now helping administer educational reform in Bosnia. The OSCE is also earmarked to observe the referendum on independence in Montenegro early next year. This will be an enormous responsibility.

Slovenia took over the Organization at a time of high political discontent. The OSCE had no budget and there was no agreement on a new Secretary General. However, order has been restored in the past year. The OSCE now has a new Secretary General, an agreement on the budget, and an agreement on reform. Russian objections have softened over the course of the year.

2005 was also marked by big changes in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, where the OSCE played a central role in managing conflict, facilitating dialogue, and helping with reforms.

The March events in Kyrgyzstan led to a change in government and the resignation of President Akayev. The OSCE took on a leading role in terms of coordinating the international response to the Kyrgyz crisis, and facilitating dialogue between the various political stake holders. President Bakiyev made a promise to his people and the international community to work towards a Constitutional reform and to reunite the country. The will to stay the course on reforms will be fundamental to achieving lasting stability and prosperity in Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE will continue to play a central role in Kyrgyzstan—the process of democratic transition is not yet complete.

Second, the political situation in Azerbaijan is tense, and the OSCE as dialogue facilitator is central for ensuring stability. Not only are the energy sector and domestic reforms at risk, but the opportunity to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict may pass if instability in Azerbaijan persists. Dialogue between the opposition and the government is necessary in Azerbaijan, and the OSCE is best positioned to provide this service. The geopolitical relevance of the Caspian region, and the interests involved, cannot be underestimated.

The developments in Uzbekistan have been difficult to digest. There has been much backpedaling on reforms since the Andijan massacre, and President Karimov has cut dialogue with the West. The OSCE, however, has managed to keep the channels of communication open with the government in

Tashkent. While Uzbekistan's security risks are real and should be acknowledged, respect for human rights and individual freedoms are non-negotiable axioms upon which the OSCE community was founded. More needs to be done to ensure that certain standards are upheld.

OSCE is also needed in resolving the South Ossetian problem. It is the right forum for dialogue facilitation, and recently, an ice-breaking meeting was held in Slovenia between the South Ossetians, Georgia, North Ossetia, and Russia.

The fact that there was no Ministerial Declaration in Ljubljana or that Secretary Rice didn't attend the meeting says very little about the state of the OSCE, and even less about America's attitude towards the organization. 30 years after launching the Helsinki Process, the OSCE remains at the forefront of international engagement in Central Asia, and crucial to progress in the Western Balkans and South Caucasus. The US has been a big supporter of the OSCE efforts in Central Asia and the Balkans, and one of the staunchest defenders of the OSCE's human dimension. To conclude any differently is plain wrong.

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