

Bruce George urges OSCE Permanent Council to take a courageous approach to reform

“We seek to influence the work and to contribute to the success of the organization. Our role is to support, sustain, cajole, underpin, encourage, warn, and to scrutinize. We do not want to usurp your role, but to assist and complement it”, said OSCE PA President Bruce George to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on 27 May 2004. The President used his address to bid farewell to the Permanent Council since his term of office expires at the July 2004 OSCE PA Annual Session in Edinburgh. President George emphasized that the past two years have witnessed an increase in the cooperation between the parliamentary and governmental dimensions of the OSCE. As concrete examples of this cooperation, he mentioned the enhancement of the Mediterranean dialogue in the OSCE, election observation missions, the cooperation on combating Anti-Semitism as well as the interactions with the OSCE working groups on Human Trafficking and Gender Issues. Regarding the latter he reminded the Permanent Council that although an equal number of men and women are employed in the OSCE overall, a thick glass ceiling prevents women from entering the leadership.

“The first steps on the road to a more meaningful partnership have been made, and I think we all can be proud that we have managed to come this far”, the President said, as he expressed also his earnest hope that this cooperation could be deepened to an even greater extent. “On the Parliamentary Assembly’s side, we have done our homework, urging our Committees to improve the way our resolutions address OSCE issues. I hope we shall see convincing results of these efforts as early as this summer. But then we also need to know more about your opinion on our decisions. This is particularly true for our comments on the budget. Both deserve a more formal response.”

Speaking on the future of the OSCE, the President said he could not avoid adding “less jubilant notes”.

“If I look at what is sometimes said about that which the PA considers to be the greatest asset of the OSCE, namely the field missions, I get extremely worried. I hear that many delegations in Vienna are dissatisfied with what they perceive as decisions imposed by small minorities, the unimaginativeness of many discussions and the style of deliberations in the Permanent Council. Discordant notes between the states “East” and “West” of Vienna are becoming more strident. The system of field missions, which some of the representatives that have one in their country regard almost as a mark of Cain, is being ever more clearly put in question by many states East of Vienna. Other criticism includes the Organization’s lack of success in the resolution of what are known as ‘frozen conflicts’. President George repeated his warning at the Porto Ministerial that “we should not confuse activity with achievement”. He emphasized that if the OSCE wants to perform its duties effectively, there is no way of avoiding reform. He reminded the PC that several C-i-O’s have taken up the persistent call of the OSCE PA for a more differentiated system of less-than-consensus-based decisions. “It therefore worries me that it has immediately and categorically been rejected by some delegations”, he said, stress-

ing that an organization that does not adapt to the need for changes is doomed to failure. The President urged the Permanent Council to take a “very courageous approach to reform” and mentioned some keywords as a way of contributing to a broader debate on measures that should be considered:

- Reduce Micro-Management
“Without wanting this to be seen as criticism of our excellent Secretary General, when he leaves I would certainly like to see his successor bestowed with greater powers. I know that this may be controversial, but perhaps it might be considered appropriate to make it a more political job, similar to the NATO Secretary General.”
- Change your Consensus rule.
“Again, I, like most of my fellow country-men, would not like to give up our right to veto decisions that effect vital interests of our country – but anything below that, and this certainly includes decisions on personnel, should be governed by less than consensus.”
- More funds for the field missions
- Establish field or roaming missions in countries west of Vienna
- Reduce number and length of conferences
- Combat lengthy solemn declarations in favour of open discussions on concise, concrete and substantial issues
- Reduce percentage of seconded staff in the field
- Give feedback on PA resolutions and on its budgetary recommendations
- Work together with the PA on fundamental mid- and long-term security issues
- Consult the Assembly on the closing of field missions

President George concluded by underlining that the Assembly and the OSCE have achieved much, but that there is much more to be done to achieve the objectives laid down in the Helsinki Documents. “We owe so much to our citizens throughout the OSCE area and even beyond, to help create a more just, peaceful and prosperous environment”.

