

Foreword

The Caucasus: a high mountain range between Europe and Asia, home to over 40 different peoples and ethnic groups, and for centuries the staging ground for bloody wars and conflicts. With indigenous Caucasian-speaking peoples such as the Chechens, Ingush, Adyghe, Abkhaz, and Georgians, Mongolic-speaking Kalmyks, Turkic peoples such as the Karachays and Azeri, Indo-European peoples such as the Armenians, and the Iranophone Ossetians and Talysh, the Caucasus is the most diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious region of Europe. Over the centuries, the landscape of this region has left its mark on the way of life of its inhabitants. Numerous isolated territorial and economic communities have come into existence. There is a long tradition of resisting conquerors and foreign rulers. Modern administrative structures have been layered on top of ancient tribal and clan structures. Armenians, Azeri, and Georgians now have their own independent republics, while most of the other peoples and ethnic groups live in territorial entities that, while formally part of a greater entity, enjoy a high degree of *de facto* self-governance, such as the Regions and Autonomous Republics of Russia and the three Caucasus republics. The plethora of overlapping and interconnected conflicts makes the entire situation highly confusing. Russia has prosecuted two bloody wars against the separatist republic of Chechnya, and the conflict threatens to spill over into Ingushetia and North Ossetia. For its part, South Ossetia finds itself in a secession conflict with Georgia, which – along with the separatist struggle in Abkhazia – did not end with the change of regime in Georgia. These conflicts, however, also place a strain on relations between Moscow and Tbilisi. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh is one of those considered “frozen” and equally not resolved. All these conflicts, whether they are described as inter-ethnic, ethno-national, ethno-territorial, minority, or secession conflicts, share one thing in common. They are, at one and the same time, conflicts of identity and conflicts of interest: Ethnic and religious affiliations appear to play as large a role as economic and political ambitions. The breeding grounds are the economic, social, and political problems of the post-Socialist transformation. Historical factors are mobilized by all sides to legitimize their demands, claims, and actions. A solution to these conflicts seems simply impossible to find. Does Europe need to reconcile itself to the long-term existence of this powder keg, or can external influences contribute to defusing the situation?

The Caucasus, and not only its conflicts, but also positive developments and prospects for the future are the special focus of the OSCE Yearbook 2004. In no less than nine contributions, internationally renowned regional

experts examine the causes and backgrounds of the conflicts, the factors that have caused them to escalate, and the means available to resolve them. They also discuss the latest political developments in the Caucasus republics, examine the role of religion, and explore transregional economic and political interrelationships.

The intense debate over OSCE reform, which has been running for years, is taken up again in this volume. Recently, the stakes have been dramatically raised, not least as a result of heavy and – in the last year increasing – criticism from Russia and a majority of the other CIS states. At the heart of their criticisms – now as before – are three points. While these, which were discussed in detail in last year's Yearbook, concern the OSCE as a whole, they focus in particular on criticism of the OSCE's field missions: the geographical asymmetry of the field presences, the asymmetry in terms of the issues they deal with – expressed as a dissatisfaction with the concentration on the human dimension at the expense of the OSCE's other two dimensions – and the perception of interference by OSCE missions in the internal affairs of their host states. The extent of this problem is made abundantly clear by the fact that it is not only discussed in the course of the regular annual look at developments and prospects in the OSCE but runs like a thread through numerous contributions – not least those on conflict prevention and dispute settlement on the ground. In one contribution, specifically dealing with OSCE field missions, concrete proposals have been made on how to solve the problems or at least to take the sting out of the criticisms.

Further key topics covered in this Yearbook include education – the focus of the Bulgarian OSCE Chairmanship – and, for the first time, anti-Semitism, following the OSCE conference on the topic that was held in Berlin in the spring, and which met with such an excellent response.

It is always interesting to observe which specific issues emerge as shared acute concerns as a result of authors' independent investigations of general topics and problems. The overall picture that is revealed of problems that will need increased attention in the future includes a mixture of "old" topics, such as that of whether international organizations are going to co-operate or compete, and "new" issues, such as conflict economies, organized crime, and corruption. The fact that a chapter dealing specifically with the co-operation between the OSCE and Transparency International is accompanied by four further contributions in which this successful and globally active NGO is also mentioned suggests that "corruption" is becoming one of the most important contemporary issues – one that needs to be tackled more intensively at both national and international levels. Indeed, the blight of corruption is considered one of the greatest obstacles to democratization and the creation of functioning market economies, and a cause of economic and social problems that not only disrupt people's lives, but also create breeding grounds for terrorism and civil war. Another "new" topic, one encapsulated by the motto "out of area or out of business", concerns the expansion of specific OSCE

activities – particularly election monitoring – into neighbouring countries and regions. The OSCE's involvement in the elections in Afghanistan in October 2004, led by the diplomat Robert L. Barry, whose comments on the OSCE's future tasks are carried in this volume, gives an indication of what may come.

To go into detail on all the issues, questions, and problems dealt with in this book would exceed the remit of this foreword. Nonetheless, I would like to repeat a demand that has been made by many within the OSCE – one that is raised in several contributions to this Yearbook. This is the demand for greater *political* commitment on the part of the Organization, especially at the highest political level. To the extent that the missions attempt to avoid opening themselves to accusations of interfering in the internal affairs of their host countries, to the extent that they thereby concentrate instead on specific activities and projects, the Organization as a whole needs to increase the attention it pays to the major questions of security and stability, democracy and human rights, and to economic and environmental developments. These issues must be the common concern of all members of an organization that understands itself as a political community – not only an organization for security and co-operation, but a community of values. In defending the interests of the people living in the OSCE area, “interference” is not only legitimate but essential. And although it already occurs – in the form of the activities of OSCE institutions such as the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media – it also needs to be realized at the highest political level. The OSCE needs to take clear political positions on the big questions, and to be seen to be committed. The OSCE Secretary General's efforts to mediate between the camps during the Ukrainian election crisis of autumn 2004 and the Organization's comprehensive monitoring of the new elections, which will be of major and previously unsuspected international importance, are a step in this direction. Nonetheless, the question remains as to whether the fact that the OSCE changes its leadership annually does not place it at a long-term disadvantage compared to other organizations. Continuity is only ensured at the administrative level and not at the political, which weakens the Organization's political significance. The OSCE should therefore certainly not let the opportunity to establish itself as a political actor – to “repoliticize” its work – pass by.

In 2004, one year before the OSCE's landmark 30th anniversary, we have celebrated a mini anniversary, the tenth birthday of the OSCE Yearbook. We would like to express our gratitude to the authors whose extraordinary dedication and profound knowledge have made this Yearbook, like all its predecessors, a source of valuable information on conflicts and efforts to resolve them and on the many-sided work of the OSCE.