

Preface by the Chairman-in-Office

To be asked to pen the foreword to one of the most consistently informative books on the OSCE is a great honour for me. As a writer it gives me pleasure to practice my old “profession”, but especially in my present dual role as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE and Foreign Minister of Slovenia, I feel I have a special duty to try to express some thoughts on what this means both for myself and my country.

As everyone appreciates, the year 2005, marking six decades since the dramatic end of World War II, is full of important anniversaries related to that key event. The OSCE is marking two events of its own, namely the signing of two landmark documents: the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, 30 years ago, on 1 August 1975, and the signing of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, 15 years ago, on 21 November 1990. These two documents are the keystones in the security architecture of post-World War II Europe. And over the last 30 years they have come to provide both the foundation and the impetus for a more united and secure continent.

The OSCE will also remember the signing of these two documents in December when the Foreign Ministers of the 55 participating States gather in Ljubljana for the annual meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council. I hope that when I greet them there, they will also be able to look back on a year that has seen significant progress made in meeting the goals and priorities of both the OSCE and the Slovenian Chairmanship.

As I write these lines in the early summer, I have already been privileged to witness great strides towards democracy taken in two OSCE States: Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. After disputed elections, which were fairly and transparently monitored by the OSCE’s own acclaimed election specialists, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE was able to play a role in reducing post-election tensions and encouraging the peaceful transfer of power. Thus, in January, I was able to make my first foreign trip as Chairman-in-Office to visit the newly elected President in Kyiv. In April, I was able to talk personally to the authorities in Bishkek and encourage them to settle their difference at the ballot box, but this time with important changes in order to secure a free and fair process.

Neither of these events had figured in my plans as I looked forward to assuming the Chairmanship. But the way that the OSCE played a vital role in both simply underlined for me the enormous value of this marvellously flexible and resourceful body. The fact that the events occurred on my watch meant that I could be proud to have been a part of the process of encouraging the peaceful spread of democracy.

Now as I look forward to the rest of the year, I expect it will leave me with yet more memories of further important steps along the road to the fulfilment of the OSCE's mandate. While the OSCE helps to keep a lid on potential conflict situations in Georgia and Moldova and between Armenia and Azerbaijan, supports stability in South-eastern Europe, and particularly Kosovo, and performs many other less loudly trumpeted tasks, it can hope to encourage States to adhere to their military confidence building agreements, to firmly anchor human rights on the bedrock of the rule of law, and to develop good governance and encourage the kind of economic prosperity that will eventually lead to peaceful relations between neighbours across the whole vast region from Vancouver to Vladivostok.