OSCE CHRONICLE

Romania the new Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE

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1. Romania Chairman-in-Office for 2001

As of 1 January this year, Romania has taken over the Chairmanship of the OSCE from Austria. After Czechoslovakia (1992) and Poland (1998), Romania is the third former socialist country which has been granted this increasingly important position within the OSCE. At the moment the decision on Romania's chairmanship was taken more than a year ago, few would have expected that this would be under a new government of the former communist party. At the elections in November last year, the former communists gained a clear victory, doing away with the coalition government under the former President Constantinescu. Romania is again ruled by a government of the former communist party, and Ilescu who, was defeated in 1996, has again gained the Presidency.

This will undoubtedly have an influence on the Romanian policy as Chairman-in-Office, although it is too early to assess its precise impact. The new government is much less Western-oriented than the former one and this will be reflected in its role in the OSCE as well.

The Austrians have made great efforts to make their Chairmanship a success, although it had started under a gloomy sky because of the EU sanctions against the country. This was due to the fact that the strongly nationalist Haiders-party had entered the new Austrian government which resulted in a wave of international protests against (and within) the country. Although the Austrian government officially denies that this embarrassing situation has negatively influenced its role within the OSCE, few observers doubt that this has indeed been the case. However, the Austrian Foreign Minister may certainly not be blamed for inactivity, because few of her predecessors have spent so much time on travelling to the various OSCE states and hot spots in the region. Unfortunately, the Austrian Chairmanship was concluded with a failed Ministerial Council meeting in Vienna in November last year. It did not even succeed in producing a concluding document, so that a summary report by the Chairperson-in-Office had to be invented as a substitute (see below). Although hardly anyone blames the Austrians for this failure, it was a sad end to a year a hard work.

The incoming Romanian Chairmanship, headed by the new Foreign Minister

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of Romania, Mircea Dan Geoana, started its term full of ambitions. ‘We want to develop new ideas for strengthening political dialogue between OSCE states’, Mr. Geoana said in an address to the Permanent Council on 11 January. ‘We want the OSCE to be known as the organization which produces concrete results, not only resolutions — results which could impact in a positive way on people’s lives.’

In his address the CIO listed several issues on which the organization will focus its attention during the coming year. In the area of the human dimension of the OSCE, the Romanians intend to focus on new problems and issues, such as trafficking in human beings, children in armed conflict, and the integration of refugees and displaced persons. Later this year the CIO intends to organize a conference in Bucharest on Roma and Sinti issues.

The new Chairman also mentioned Central Asia as a focal point for his work in 2001. In his speech the Foreign Minister referred to Central Asia as ‘a region of immense importance, which deserves our attention’. He stressed the OSCE’s will to work with Central Asian states to identify areas of co-operation that will yield concrete and positive results, while meeting the objectives of the Platform for Co-operative Security. OSCE goals include enhancing the development of the rule of law, civil society and the rights of the individual; to promote economic prosperity and environmental security; and to explore the most appropriate ways to ensure the security of borders against external threats. Central Asia has also been a key area for the Austrian Chairmanship. Although the region is quite important for the organization, relations with Central Asian states have become more and more difficult over the last few years. The latter states often accuse the OSCE of allegedly having a one-sided approach, of focusing too much on human dimension issues, not taking into account the (cultural) specificities of the region. Romania as a former socialist country itself may have unique opportunities to re-establish good co-operation with these five OSCE states.

2. The failure of the Eighth Ministerial Council meeting in Vienna
The eighth meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Vienna on 27 and 28 November last year was a clear reflection of the growing disagreements among the 55 participating states. The traditional Ministerial Declaration could not be adopted because of a lack of the required consensus. So, the meeting ended with some kind of summary statement by the Austrian Chairman-in-Office, Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner, which lacks binding force. The Russian delegation made this abundantly clear by stating that Ms. Ferrero-Waldner’s ‘propositions and conclusions are not in line with the understandings negotiated by all participating States and, consequently, are not based on the consensus principle. The Russian Federation does not consider itself bound by any of the conclusions or recommendations contained in the summary.’ The US Ambassador agreed with the non-binding nature of the Chair’s summary, but made it clear that insofar as the Chair’s remarks were a repetition of commitments or obligations previously undertaken under OSCE agreements, ‘they remain commitments and obligations of us all’.

Helsinki Monitor 2001 no. 1