The OSCE Yearbook has become — as rightly mentioned in the preface by the Slovenian Chairman-in-Office, Dimitrij Rupela — one of the most consistently informative books on the OSCE. It presents a highly comprehensive overview and critical analysis of recent developments in the OSCE and places these in their larger political and historical context.

The volume is divided into three general headings and seven different sections. As the richness of the contributions can by no means all be adequately dealt with in a book review, the focus will be on some of the highlights.

By way of an introduction, Ursel Schlichting, the editor-in-chief of this OSCE Yearbook, presents in a brief overview of the OSCE, some highlights of its history, from the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 to the present.

The first section also deals with 30 years of the Helsinki Final Act. Eye-witnesses, such as Egon Bahr and John Maresca, describe the sense of potential that accompanied the start of the negotiations on the Final Act. The tensions associated with the Cold War at that time placed the success of the CSCE in doubt.

Andrei Zagorski describes in his contribution how the CSCE commitments not only helped to shape the agenda of democratization, but also established benchmark standards for all political actors seeking comprehensive reform in the Soviet Union in the period between 1989 and 1991.

The second section discusses OSCE policies of France, the Group of Like-Minded Countries within the OSCE, and Belarus. The policy of the last country is described and analysed in a rather positive way by Vladimir Ulakhovich. His position at the Belarusian State University in Minsk might be an explanation for his view on this topic.

Kees Homan is Major General (ret.) RNLMC, a senior research fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’ in The Hague, former Director of the Netherlands Defence College, and editor of Helsinki Monitor: Security and Human Rights.
In the next section, which deals with conflict prevention and dispute settlement, Douglas Davidson discusses ten years of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He concludes that the OSCE field mission has proven to be one of the best means of assisting a country in meeting the commitments it has adopted in each of the three baskets of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe as defined three decades ago. Andrea Berg does an excellent job in providing an overview of the disintegration in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. She concludes that only when the rule of law is guaranteed, will the population start to believe in abstract concepts like democracy and their own right to participate in the political and economic system.

Section four focuses on the human dimension and democratic development. Eric Manton deals with the OSCE human dimension process and the process of customary international law formation. He is critical of the insistence of some lawyers on remaining within the sacred precinct of positive law which blurs their vision and which reduces their ability to address the realities from the outside.

In the fifth section, which deals with building co-operative security, Pál Dunay focuses on the contribution of the politico-military dimension, which in his opinion has become limited. As the most important objective reason, he finds that the prime concerns of European security are no longer confined to the realm of the politico-military dimension.

The sixth section focuses on OSCE Institutions and Structures. Under the heading ‘The Bulgarian Chairmanship between Crises’, Kurt P. Tudyka evaluates this chairmanship. He concludes that the Bulgarian Chairmanship inherited an OSCE plagued by crisis and passed it on unchanged. While there was no shortage of activity, the Bulgarian Chairmanship never believed that the OSCE could be healed. For the second time in a row the participating States were unable to agree upon a Joint Declaration when the Chairmanship was handed over in November 2004.

In the last section, which deals with external relations, Aleksi Härkönen focuses on the prospects for an enlarged role for the OSCE. In the past few years, the OSCE has undertaken efforts to strengthen relations with its Partner States. One of his conclusions is that for the Partners, other organizations — the United Nations as well as several regional organizations — may be the main avenues for security co-operation, for the decision on whether to implement OSCE principles, norms and commitments is therefore the result of a cost-benefit analysis. In addition to the separate contributions, the OSCE Yearbook also contains 96 pages of annexes with a highly useful selection of documents. These include, among others, the Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons, the Report on the Colloquium on ‘The Future of the OSCE’, a report from the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) in Hamburg on Evaluating the OSCE and Its Future Role: Competencies, Capabilities, and Missions, and an OSCE Selected Bibliography 2004/2005.

The OSCE Yearbook 2005 underlines once again that since the idea, in the mid-1990s, that the OSCE could assume the central role in the structure of