Poland takes over the Chairmanship of the OSCE

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1. Poland the new Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE
Since the beginning of this year the chairmanship of the OSCE has been transferred from Denmark to Poland. This means that for the whole of 1998 the Foreign Minister of Poland, Bronislaw Geremek, will occupy the main coordinating and initiating function of this international organization. In the day-to-day work, the main tasks will be performed by two well-known Polish diplomats: Ambassador Jerzy Nowak, who heads the OSCE Co-ordinating Unit in Warsaw and who was the head of the Polish delegation to the OSCE in Vienna for several years, and Ambassador Adam Kobieracki who is the present head of the Polish delegation. Mr. Kobieracki will chair the weekly meetings of the Permanent Council in Vienna. At the end of the year Norway will become the Chairman-in-Office for the year 1999.

2. OSCE involvement in Kosovo crisis
Although it is certainly not in the leading position, the OSCE has been intensively occupied with the Kosovo crisis in the former Yugoslavia. The main workload in this respect undoubtedly rests upon the shoulders of the so-called Contact Group of major powers (in particular, the USA, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, [...] ) which has initiated new sanctions against the Belgrade regime because of its brutal policies to crush the Albanian opposition in Kosovo. However, the OSCE has also a certain role to play.

So far, the OSCE has been active, among other things, through the OSCE’s High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel, who had been appointed Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office. In this capacity he had been trying in vain to travel to Kosovo for a long time. Only in February this year did he manage to get a visa for a trip which took place between 17 and 20 February. During this visit he had meetings with the Albanian leadership in Pristina. In Belgrade, however, he was received only by lower-level officials, a clear signal that the Serbian government was not very keen on his involvement.

After the outbreak of the violence at the beginning of March, however, the initiative was taken over by the Contact Group. Surprisingly, the role of Van der Stoel was hardly acknowledged in this context. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise when he immediately decided to resign as Personal
Representative.

The OSCE's main role was thereafter taken over by the former Spanish Prime Minister, Felipe González, in the capacity as Personal Representative of the CIO for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. (González had also been instrumental in ending the crisis which broke out after the fraudulent elections in Belgrade more than a year previously.) Although Belgrade likes to view the Kosovo crisis as an internal affair of the FRY, the OSCE made it very clear that 'the crisis in Kosovo is not solely an internal affair of the FRY because of violations of OSCE principles and commitments on human rights and because it has a significant impact on the security of a region, as well as taking into account the need for immediate efforts by the international community to prevent further escalation'.

One of the concrete actions, undertaken by the OSCE, was to increase the monitoring of the Macedonian and Albanian borders with Kosovo in order to prevent a spill-over of the conflict into these two neighbouring countries. With this purpose the OSCE missions in both countries were temporarily strengthened.

In spite of all international efforts to put pressure on the Serbian and Kosovo-Albanian parties to start an open dialogue on the problems with prior conditions, the violence in Kosovo continues. The Yugoslav police and army continue their activities to crush the fighters of the Kosovo Liberation Army which also continues its activities against Serbians. It has resulted in a considerable number of casualties, most of them ethnic Albanians. The cruelties which have been committed in this respect are appalling.

3. Council of Ministers met in Copenhagen in December

From 18 to 19 December, the annual meeting of the OSCE Council of Ministers took place in Copenhagen, the capital of the then Chairman-in-Office. Nobody can be blamed for not having noticed this event, as the meeting has drawn hardly any attention in the press. This cannot be a great surprise, since the meeting did not produce much which was news-worthy.

Nevertheless, the Council meeting produced some results which are worth mentioning here. In a certain way the meeting had the character of a stock-taking gathering in which the Danish Chairmanship looked back at its efforts. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Chairman’s Summary which was published at the end of the meeting contained quite a few positive words. It was noted, for instance, that ‘(n)ever before have the OSCE participating States engaged their organization so actively as their vehicle in so many issues relevant to their common security’.

Positive examples which were cited by the Council included the OSCE’s role in Bosnia, Albania, and Croatia. Progress was also noted in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Chechnya, Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan although

1. Decision No. 218 of the Permanent Council (11 March 1998).