

**Kommersant (Russian Federation): Interview**  
**OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Dr Dimitrij Rupel**

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**1) Lately there has not been much warmth in OSCE-Russia relations. Moscow threatened with "downsizing" the financing of the organisation, blocking the budget issue. What is reason for that? How can we overcome this crisis?**

I believe that relations remain warm and friendly. Certainly Foreign Minister Lavrov assures me of the Russia's full support for the OSCE in our personal encounters, although some Duma members or other commentators may have their own opinions. But no part of the Organization's work is ever perfect and all States are free to criticize different aspects. However, it is hard to see what could justify bringing the entire work of the OSCE to a halt. I see no current crisis over the budget, but the best way to avoid one is for all States to abide by the common process of discussing issues rationally in the spirit of compromise, without using the budget process as some kind of financial veto. It would be truly a tragedy for the work of the OSCE to be suspended next year due to a lack of agreement about relatively small amount of money. The entire OSCE budget is not even 180 million euros, much less than the cost of the conflicts it prevents.

**2) Russian politicians often accuse OSCE of double standards. How do you respond to that?**

Slovenia began the OSCE Chairmanship well aware of the responsibility as the OSCE chairing country, as well as of the necessity for transparent OSCE operations and increased responsiveness of the Organisation to the needs of the participating states and their citizens. To achieve that I outlined the Triple R Agenda of our Chairmanship already in January, with a purpose to Reform, Rebalance and Revitalise the OSCE.

I say, as I have often done this year, that there is no real evidence to support the claim of double standards. The same standards are scrupulously applied throughout the Organization's work. The same democratic rights, rule of law and basic freedoms should be equally enjoyed everywhere, regardless of self-proclaimed inherent differences.

**3) President Lukashenko accused OSCE of financing the Belarus opposition. Is this true? What is OSCE's position towards Minsk? What is your "forecast" of future developments there?**

The Organization is not in the business of financing opposition parties anywhere. Where would the funds come from? The OSCE has an open budgetary process.

Belarus is one of the OSCE's 55 participating states. Organisation is committed to continue working with the Belarus on a number o issues. To this end I intended to visit Minsk as the OSCE Chairman-in-Office ten days ago. Unfortunately this could not take place, but I remain optimistic and I hope to go there before the end of the Chairmanship.

We hope that Belarus, which is facing elections next year, will fully honour the commitments it has made, and then I believe that future developments will be stable and democratic and clearly in the best interests of the people of Belarus.

**4) OSCE “praised” Kyrgyzstan quite a lot lately? Are you satisfied with the progress of the country after the revolution?**

The OSCE supported Kyrgyzstan closely during a turbulent period as its previous government fell after unsatisfactory parliamentary elections in March. The OSCE was the only international organisation on the spot when this took place. Events were poised to go either a violent or a peaceful way and what we have often praised is the maturity and resolve shown by the population and its political leaders who chose to pursue the peaceful way of change. In offering a focus of stability and specific programmes to strengthen democracy, law enforcement and economic development, the OSCE has tried hard to make practical assistance available to support that choice. Although there is a long way to go we are pleased so far with the results and with friendly support from its neighbours, including the RF, Kyrgyzstan will make further progress.

**5) What is your position on Kazakhstan's candidature for the OSCE Chairmanship and what is your assessment of the preparations for presidential elections?**

According to OSCE practice the decision on the OSCE's Chairmanship 2009 is taken by rule two years in advance. Therefore a decision on Kazakhstan's candidature will not fall in my period of Chairmanship, but rather that of my successor, the Foreign Minister of Belgium, so I would prefer not to comment on it for that reason, other than to say that I offer Kazakhstan my best wishes in carrying out the role if it is successful in its bid.

We will follow with great interest the process of preparations and the conduct of the Kazakhstan's presidential elections announced for 4th December 2005.

**6) Elections in Azerbaijan are coming soon. What is your position regarding persecution of the protesters? Is "color revolution" possible in Baku?**

If by "protesters" you mean peaceful demonstrations by supporters of opposition parties then there is no question but that these are allowed under OSCE commitments to a fair electoral process.

The issue of freedom of assembly was, in fact, raised in an interim report of 14 October by the election observation mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which was deployed in Azerbaijan on 5 September. The mission expressed serious concern that freedom of assembly was not being respected. It noted, for example, that the opposition "remains under strong restriction in its attempts to hold rallies in central Baku and central locations in regional cities".

I call on all sides to respect the democratic election process in a responsible manner.

**7) Recently Georgia's parliament demanded withdrawal of Russian peace troops from South Ossetia. How do you assess the situation in the region and what can OSCE do to resolve the conflict?**

As recently as the first week of October, I sent my Personal Representative for Georgia, the former Foreign Minister of Romania, Mircea Geoana, to assess the situation at first hand. I cannot do better than to repeat what he told me, that the Georgian and South Ossetian sides must take a step towards reopening the dialogue in order to calm down existing tensions and proceed with demilitarization. What the OSCE can do is to be prepared to work and deliver on a variety of practical issues on the ground, such as assistance with efforts to demilitarize as soon as possible the zone of conflict. We are also ready to increase our activities to economically rehabilitate the zone of conflict, and for this purpose the OSCE Mission to Georgia has launched a Needs Assessment Study. We are also ready to assist efforts for closer interaction between law enforcement officials in the zone of conflict. I hope we can achieve some progress before the Ministerial Council in December in Ljubljana.

**8) The OSCE's assessment of the Yushchenko plan for Transdnistria is positive. The OSCE however does not agree with proposed December parliamentary elections in Transdnistria. What is the solution of the situation?**

I would like to be very clear on this: in no case will the OSCE either observe or afford recognition to the elections being organized by Transdnistriean authorities in mid-December. The current situation in Transdnistria regarding freedom of speech and the press or political pluralism as well the activities of the so-called Ministry for State Security do not allow for democratic elections in the region at the moment.

The OSCE will continue to press for the democratization of the Transdnistriean region.

As one step to that end and in response to a request by the President of Ukraine and Moldova, I have initiated consultations within the OSCE on a possible International Assessment Mission to evaluate conditions and necessary steps to be taken for free elections in Transdnistria.

**9) Russia and the Istanbul commitments. What's your position on this?**

I am pleased that some progress is being made in terms of the withdrawal of material and men from Russian bases on the territory of Georgia but as you know the commitments made in Istanbul went further than this and affect another participating State, Moldova, where progress has really been suspended now for more than a year while a wider solution is sought. It would help if the RF were to resume progress with the withdrawal from Transdniestria offered to make in 1999