

Dear Assistant Minister, Excellencies, dear Honorary Chairman,
Ladies and gentleman,

This conference is devoted to the study of the OSCE-process over the last more than thirty years, to discuss and consider what has been achieved and what was not. When it all began in the early 1970s I think nobody would have thought that these talks would or even might lead to a quite stable and important institution comprising more than 50 countries. What was once a “Conference” in the 1970s developed into an “Organisation” in the mid 1990s. The OSCE now is an organisation, but it is also a process, most important for the policy of détente. I will not try and analyze this process here and now. We all have seen the importance of this organisation over the last years, though it is not always in the focus of interest, maybe that this is one of its virtues, working more or less behind the scenes.

The field of history as a scholarly branch is nowadays very widespread; the different fields and sub-branches tend more or more to a process of segregation and division. Social historians obviously tend to neglect the importance of international relations and foreign affairs. As I myself actually mainly deal with social and intellectual history this conference will be a new experience for me. Looking at the latest publications about European history I was more than astonished that in the praised book by Tony Judt, “Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945” the OSCE is mentioned only once, September 1990, with regard to the Paris Conference. The Helsinki conference is dealt with on three pages, the following conferences are not mentioned at all.

In my opinion first the CSCE and then the OSCE was and is important as an institution that develops the structure to trust one another, a category that is so important in human life. CSCE lead to the end of the East-West conflict and I think that the OSCE is important as an international organisation that build the basis for peaceful relations between countries.

The Zikic Foundation (Michael Zikic Stiftung) was founded in december 1998 by the German physician of Serbian origin Dr. Michael Zikic to promote the relations and cooperation between Germany and Serbia by promoting in particular the cultural and scientific relations between the two countries. So the foundation concentrates its activities on the promotion of the humanities and the social sciences, the realms of education, and the arts, on culture as a whole. Culture is a difficult word, here I have translated it from German into English and the word or the term has changed its connotations, as the meaning is different in both languages. So to translate is the attempt to communicate a certain meaning from one language into the

other, from one culture into the other with the aim to understand one another. I think that this was Dr. Zikic's main consideration and his final goal that communication and cooperation leads in the long run to at least a rudimentary form of understanding. One might call this naïve or unrealistic, but it is in any way worth trying. The Zikic foundation promotes contacts between German and Serbian scholars, artists, students and pupils. We produce a number of publications that focus mainly on these already mentioned topics. You will see some of them on the table outside. In December 2005 we founded the fond Mihajla Zikica here in Belgrad according to Serbian law. The Fond has the same aims and goals as its German sister organisation.

I would like to thank first of all our host country and in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and the Finnish government as the chairman of the OSCE this year for making this conference possible, special thanks also to the embassy of the OSCE with ambassador Hans-Ola Urstad at its head and Mr. Vladimir Bilandzic for all the work that was done; and of course also many thanks to our sponsors that helped to make this international conference possible: German Lufthansa, the Sava Centar, the Gerda Henkel Stiftung in Düsseldorf and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C. Mr. Milan Kosanovic came up with the idea of this conference and convinced a lot of other people including myself who as I have mentioned already is not a specialist for international relations or the the history of foreign affairs. Together with Irina Mesinga and all the other people,

from the Belgrade NGO-Center and the Fond Mihajlo Zikica he has worked hard over the last weeks and months to make this conference happen. I really thank him and his team for all the work they have done.

I wish that we will have a very good conference, lively and stimulating papers and discussions in a friendly atmosphere, good talks in the lobby and new results, new and brilliant ideas for further research and finally a thorough publication to continue the process of scholarly research. I wish us success in all these tasks.