

Often our delegations were more concerned to reaffirm the view that the rights of minorities are collective individual rights -- not group rights needing special sensitivity. Or they were trying to ensure that the new office of High Commissioner on National Minorities would have no real impact. Or pretending that what the public calls ethnic violence has nothing to do with minorities. Or that minorities and majorities don't get along because they don't want to, or can't.

We all have preconceived notions about what we can and should do in the CSCE. There are traditions, positions and a diplomatic language that have their own mystique and philosophy -- and rigidity.

But publics everywhere are demanding more from multilateral institutions: more action, more decisiveness, more leadership. That is why we have a special responsibility to make sure the CSCE works.

In the past, we have dedicated ourselves to the promotion of what I would call certain basic propositions: the right of people to freedom of thought, conscience, travel, expression, religion, human contacts and things that we really believe in.

Back in 1975, the mere fact that we, as so-called ideological adversaries, could sit at a common table and reach agreement on some issues was a security-giving exercise in itself.

Our world has become more complex and so have our security needs. We now have a CSCE community where, ostensibly, democratic pluralism, human rights and the rule of law are accepted as our common foundation.

Our task now is to entrench our CSCE commitments and take steps to implement them, promote them and protect them. Then and only then will we have meaningful security.

In other words, we have to mean what we say, and as members of this organization we are going to hold each other to it.

Pledges to protect the rights of minorities must be respected. More than one war of conquest has been launched to liberate an embattled minority. New, liberal, co-operative governments can be replaced by vengeful xenophobes, dangerously undoing the transformations of recent years but seizing office on the promise to use force to protect their ethnic minorities abroad.

The stakes are very high -- not just the credibility of this organization to be sure, but the credibility of political leadership with the people as well. It isn't easy.

The CSCE is being challenged to deal with some of the most difficult and intractable problems in Europe: ethnic hatreds