



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking to Europe for Global Leadership

IN AN IMPORTANT NEW development, the Open Society Institute in 2006 established the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). The purpose of the ECFR is to strengthen the role of the European Union as an open society and to influence the EU'S foreign policy so that it promotes the values of an open society internationally, especially in its immediate neighborhood.

One of our reasons for creating the council is the growing tensions within Europe over how to deal with its substantial and, in some places, resentful Muslim minority. Some countries have adopted measures that weaken commitments to civil liberties and that could exacerbate difficulties in integrating minorities. The situation has also fostered xenophobic attitudes that are likely to increase tensions and could result in an escalation of violence. We think it is important to examine the way that Europe treats its minorities and to recommend policies and practices that promote both equal treatment and civic harmony.

Europe must also play a more important role in efforts to develop open societies elsewhere. The declining influence of the United States as a force for the promotion of open societies internationally makes the role of Europe an urgent concern. The dismal performance of the new United Nations Human Rights Council in its first year suggests that it will not make a useful contribution. Nor does it seem that most governments or intergovernmental bodies in other parts of the world will promote open societies. Europe seems the best hope, though it is clear that getting the 27 member states of the European Union to act more cohesively and effectively on behalf of open society principles is no easy task.

The performance of Europe in its treatment of its own minorities and its success in maintaining civil freedom are closely related to its capacity to promote democracy and human rights internationally. One reason for the reduced influence of the United States in promoting open societies elsewhere is that its own violations of rights in the name of the "war on terror," especially its tolerance of torture and its reliance on prolonged incommunicado detention without charges or trial, have undermined America's credibility internationally. Europe's worldwide reputation is not comparably tarnished. Yet unless Europe adheres to open society principles at home, it too will have little standing to promote those principles abroad.

In recent years, the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) of OSI has published a number of reports on the treatment of minorities in certain countries of western Europe. These have been well received, particularly in the United Kingdom, where our reports were warmly welcomed both by leaders of minority communities and by government officials. Building on this work, EUMAP is planning to publish reports on Muslims in 11 cities in seven countries. Policies adopted and implemented at a local level often have a major impact. During the riots in France in 2005, for example, Paris and most other large cities suffered severe disturbances while the country's second largest city, Marseille, which has a substantial and influential Muslim population, remained calm.

The ECFR is still in its formative stages. Former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari has agreed to chair the ECFR and Mark Leonard, a British foreign policy analyst and commentator, has been appointed as executive director. The council is supported by a number of European donors as well as by OSI.

OSI's Geographical Expansion Continues

Also during 2006, OSI and the Soros foundations network continued their geographical expansion. In addition to the expansion of our activities in western Europe, OSI extended its work in three regions: South Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa. In South Asia, we increased our presence in Pakistan, a country where we have been active for a few years. Many of our activities focus on issues that particularly affect women, including equal rights under the law, access to education, and entrepreneurship. We launched a program in Nepal to take advantage of an opportunity to promote democratic development at a moment when a peace process led by civil society ended a brutal war between government forces and Maoist rebels. In Afghanistan, we support programs ranging from legal assistance for the poor to independent media to cultural projects.

A new initiative in the Middle East is the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture with donors from the region joining us in supporting theater, filmmaking, writing, translations, and publishing. Also, during 2006, OSI's Middle East and North Africa program established offices in Amman, Jordan, to maintain close contact with our grantees in the region.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), which has operated in nine countries, extended its work to a tenth country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a particular focus will be promoting transparency for the revenues derived from extractive resource industries. OSISA collaborates closely on such issues with the Revenue Watch Institute, a newly established independent body that has taken over the work of OSI's Revenue Watch Program with support from the Norwegian government and the Hewlett Foundation as well as OSI.

The Open Society Initiative for East Africa (OSIEA), which has focused on Kenya, also expanded, launching grantmaking programs in Uganda and Tanzania. Over time, we expect OSIEA to start working in other countries as well. OSI is now active in well over half the countries of Africa. During 2007, we expect to establish an advocacy office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to represent our African foundations in relations with the African Union.

The creation of the ECFR and the expansion of our work in other regions continues the transformation of the Open Society Institute and the Soros foundations network into a global organization. We are not active in every country but we are now engaged in every region of the world. Our efforts in different parts of the world reinforce and strengthen each other, reflecting the global nature of the struggle for open society.

Aryeh Neier
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Large numbers of ballots and ballot boxes from the Haitian presidential election were found in Port-au-Prince's city dump amid rumors of election fraud.