

**FORTY-FIFTH REGULAR SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**“PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES”**

**DIALOGUE OF THE HEADS OF DELEGATION, THE SECRETARY GENERAL, AND THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL WITH THE HEADS OF DELEGATION OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVERS**

**REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR DR. HANS PETER MANZ**

**PERMANENT OBSERVER** **OF AUSTRIA TO THE OAS**

**Washington, D.C., June 14, 2015**

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Mr. Assistant Secretary-General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Austrian government, I would like to express my appreciation for the invitation to participate in the dialogue between the Member States and the Permanent Observer Countries to the Organization of American States.

Austria warmly welcomes this year´ s topic for the dialogue, and indeed, it appears to be the perfect time to reflect on the Future of the Organization, as recent political developments in the Western Hemisphere foster new hope to overcome dated conflicts and frictions in the region.

Allow me to reflect in particular on the recently started process to normalize relations between the US and Cuba. From an Austrian point of view, this is very good news and my government would like to commend the decision and encourage the two countries to swiftly progress towards normalization. We also would like to encourage neighboring countries in Central America and the Caribbean as well as all nations of the Hemisphere to support the process.

Mr. President,

Austria follows this normalization process with great attention and empathy for a very simple reason: A Quarter of a century ago, Austria found herself in the midst of a major transformation in Europe following the fall of the Iron Curtain. Our immediate neighbors, which belonged to the Eastern bloc, chose to adopt a new path that has led them to successful integration into the community of democratic and free economy nations in less than 15 years. Both my nation as well as our neighbors have been very positively affected by this transformation and integration process.

It is based on this experience that I emphasize today that Cuba and the US have Austria´ s sympathy, support and optimism on the path ahead.

Mr. President,

The successful transformation and integration in Europe in the aftermath of the fall of the Iron Curtain would not have been possible without the regional international organizations on the continent, such as the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe. And it is this experience that enables me to conclude that for the OAS there is a strong and important role ahead in accompanying the normalization process by providing a comprehensive regional framework. In shaping the future of the OAS, the current political situation provides a unique impulse and opportunity. Overcoming frictions can lead to better co-operation within the scope of the current structures and framework of the organization. Moreover, the impulse to optimism and the now realistic perspective to restore comprehensive partnership and co-operation among the nations of the Hemisphere will also unleash creative energy and ideas to further develop the co-operation of the members, including expanding the scope and areas of the activities of the OAS, as desired by members. From the Austrian point of view and experience, strengthening and broadening co-operation within the framework of a regional organization such as the OAS has a high potential for great mutual benefit for the members and is no contradiction, but rather a complement to global co-operation.

Mr. President,

In this respect Austria strongly encourages OAS members to seize the opportunity for action the current political situation calls for and thus embark on a dynamic path to shape the future of the OAS.

Mr. President,

In concluding, I would like to assure you that Austria, as a decades-long active observer of the OAS, remains committed to maintaining a close relationship of co-operation with the Nations in the Hemisphere, both bilaterally and through the OAS.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a successful and productive General Assembly.