

23 Jan 2006 -12:54

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BRUSSELS, 21 January, 2006 The Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, has offered his sincere condolences to the people of Kosovo and the family of President Ibrahim Rugova, on hearing the news of his death earlier today. "I am struck by a feeling of immense loss over the untimely death of a person who came to embody the search for a peaceful and democratic future for his beloved Kosovo", he said. "Over a lifetime as a dedicated pacifist, through the violence of the Second World War when both his father and grandfather were executed, to the decade of repression in Kosovo before the NATO intervention in 1999, he has always led by his personal example. Truly, he has been an outstanding figure in the history of the Balkans region." The Chairman-in-Office added that the greatest tribute that could be paid to him would be to continue on the same peaceful path: "We must show our respect for him by not allowing his death at such a sensitive time to alter the very real prospects for a lasting solution. The OSCE will maintain its strong support." News of his death was also greeted with personal sadness by the OSCE's Head of Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Werner Wendt: "Though I only took up my post in April, through my meetings with President Rugova I felt I had got to know him well and to respect him like a friend. He will be greatly missed and his example must continue to inspire us."

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