



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 710th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

24 APRIL 2008

**RE: ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
COUNCIL OF EUROPE, H.E. MR. TERRY DAVIS**

Mister Chairman:

1. The Delegation of the Holy See joins other speakers in extending a warm “welcome back” to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, H.E. Mr. Terry Davis , and thanks him for his intervention.

2. As the peoples of Europe began to rebuild their lives after the Second World War, that great conflict which ravaged the entire continent for six years, the desire to create a new European order found its first political and collegial expression in the establishment of the Council of Europe, the Charter of which was signed in London on May 5, 1949. The Council is thus the oldest among European institutions and was the first to be devoted to forging a new unity among the peoples of the continent, based on the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of the European peoples. The founding fathers of the Council of Europe affirmed that these values are “the true source of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law” (Preamble to the Statute of the Council of Europe, 1949), thus establishing the foundation for a new European political project.

Since 1970 the Holy See has been present at the Council of Europe with the status of Permanent Observer and participates actively in its deliberations. In particular, it is pleased to offer its contribution to the discussions on the religious dimension of inter-cultural dialogue.

2. The territorial extension acquired by the Council of Europe draws it close to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE, however, is also marked by its transatlantic dimension, something indispensable for maintaining peace in a globalized world and for fulfilling its mandate with regard to conflicts. From the three ways of European construction outlined in the three “baskets” of the OSCE - concerning respectively security policies, economic and ecological cooperation, and the human dimension - clearly it is this last factor which offers the broadest field of cooperation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE. However, the unique composition and working methods of the OSCE mean that its consensus-based and specific contribution will necessarily be distinct from that of the Council of Europe. This “specificity” is frequently recognized as the “added value” of our Organization and also helps to ensure that its efforts remain within the field of commitments adopted by the fifty-six participating States.

3. An area of common engagement, however, is that of the promotion of religious freedom, understood as the expression of a dimension that is at once individual and communitarian – a vision that brings out the unity of the person while clearly distinguishing between the dimension of the citizen and that of the believer. In his recent Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, Pope Benedict XVI stated: *“The rights associated with religion are all the more in need of protection if they are considered to clash with a prevailing secular ideology or with majority religious positions of an exclusive nature. The full guarantee of religious liberty cannot be limited to the free exercise of worship, but has to give due consideration to the public dimension of religion, and hence to the possibility of believers playing their part in building the social order.... Refusal to recognize the contribution to society that is rooted in the religious dimension ... would effectively privilege an individualistic approach, and would fragment the unity of the person.”*

4. In conclusion, Mister Chairman, I would like to state clearly that in the construction of the great European project the Holy See will not fail to continue to offer its cooperation. And my Delegation wishes Secretary General Davis every success in his efforts to strengthen and enhance the unity of the peoples of Europe.

Thank you, Mister Chairman!