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Statement

by

the Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Terry Davis

at

the 12th Session of the OSCE Ministerial Council

SOFIA
7 December 2004

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2004 has been a year of change! Change is the order of the day! That is why the OSCE is looking at ways of strengthening its effectiveness. The European Union and NATO have expanded. The Council of Europe has been changing too.

With the accession of Monaco, last October, the Council of Europe now groups 46 member states, double the number it had 15 years ago.

The Council of Europe will continue to change. That is why Heads of State and Government will meet in Warsaw next May to set the agenda for our Organisation in the years ahead.

Sadly, some things have not changed.

Terrorism has once again taken its cruel toll of victims in Turkey, in Spain, in Russia and elsewhere. Our horror and revulsion are a stark reminder of our duty to work together to curb this evil. The campaign to counter terrorism has been a top priority on the agendas of both the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

As for democracy, a value which we share, recent events in Ukraine, tell us that democratic transformation requires much more than the formal trappings of the electoral process. Constitutions and legislation can create democratic institutions but values and tolerance are needed to create democratic citizens. These are long term challenges which call for long term assistance to create a culture of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

These values, which draw us together, were, of course, the very foundation of the Council of Europe at its inception in the aftermath of the War, which, as your draft Declaration reminds us, ended 60 years ago next May.

They are also the values which distinguish today's democratic societies from the totalitarian regimes of the past. Since the end of the political, geographical and ideological division of our continent we have been united in working for the consolidation of those values.

As your draft Ministerial Declaration so rightly States *“a strong bond that unites us is our consensus on common principles and commitments.”*

What distinguishes Europe from most of the rest of the world is the acceptance, not only of standards and commitments, but also of action to implement those standards and commitments. The European approach is based on solidarity and collective responsibility exemplified by the strong emphasis on assistance to countries experiencing difficulties in meeting their obligations.

As Organisations committed to promoting pluralist democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe and the OSCE inevitably have a broadly common political agenda.

That is why, the Council of Europe often joins forces with the OSCE in areas such as election observation, protection of national minorities, reform of prison systems, media freedom, gender equality and the fight against trafficking in human beings to name but a few.

For the Council of Europe, working together, particularly with the OSCE, is of paramount importance in order to make the best possible use of our resources.

The Council of Europe therefore warmly welcomes the initiative taken by Norway during its chairmanship of our Committee of Ministers to enhance cooperation with the OSCE, unanimously approved last week by our respective decision-making bodies.

Personally, I am fully committed to working closely with the future Coordination Group which will be composed of Permanent Representatives of the Member and Participating States from Strasbourg and Vienna.

But I am also convinced that the best way to use both Organisations to fullest advantage is for Governments, which are our stakeholders, to state clearly how they wish us to manage matters when they believe there is a risk of unnecessary duplication.

Of course, overlap is sometimes inevitable because the Council of Europe and the OSCE share the common goal of making our continent a better, safer and fairer place.

Each, in its own way, is striving to bolster human rights, democracy and the rule of law because they are the lifeblood of political stability, good governance and economic development.

In the field we have worked and are working as partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro including Kosovo, in Moldova and in the Caucasus.

The Council of Europe’s very special contribution is its capacity to promote our shared values and democratic standards in its member countries by offering assistance to carry out what are often difficult reforms.

The same spirit underpins the efforts of the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner in promoting Human Rights in the Russian Federation. He has agreed with his interlocutors that priority has to be given to the investigation of the disappearance and search for missing persons. This fully complements the programme of cooperation in the Chechen Republic agreed between the Council of Europe and the Russian Federation covering human rights protection issues, support for the democratic process, including parliamentary elections and civil society, as well as social questions.

Since time is limited, these are just a few examples of how we contribute to the partnership which has been established between the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Our shared values provide unity of purpose for the activities of both our organisations which I am convinced will be highlighted at the Council of Europe Summit next May.

In the long run, however, the future of Europe will be decided by a generation born on a continent which is no longer divided by a political and ideological rift.

As I said at the outset it is one thing to change laws and constitutions. It is quite another to change minds and mentalities.

Thank you for your attention.