



PC.DEL/659/04

15 July 2004

ENGLISH only

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The Netherlands Presidency of the European Union

Permanent Council No. 516

14 July 2004

Statement by

**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and
President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union**

Bernard Bot

*Mr Chairman,
Secretary General,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is a privilege for me to address the distinguished members of the council of this important organisation. The Netherlands assumed the EU Presidency on 1 July and will hold it for the rest of this year – 184 days to be precise. I intend to highlight some of the priorities of the Dutch EU Presidency, both in terms of the EU itself and EU-OSCE cooperation. The EU Foreign Ministers have mandated the Dutch Presidency to prepare a report on the role of the EU vis-à-vis the OSCE and to identify ways to strengthen cooperation between us. We shall certainly do so.

As it assumes the EU Presidency, the Netherlands is benefiting from the excellent work of our Irish predecessors. Ireland successfully led the EU to an agreement on a new constitution that will make it more effective, transparent and democratic. The new EU treaty will be signed in Rome on 29 October, nearly fifty years after the original Treaty of Rome.

Under the Irish Presidency the EU also welcomed 10 new member states. In this new EU of 25 member states, interest is increasing in our new neighbours, which are also the focus of interest of the OSCE.

(Priorities)

Earlier this year, the Minister for European Affairs of Ireland eloquently set out the Irish-Dutch annual presidency programme. There is no need to repeat what Minister Roche said in January, but I would like to briefly summarise the five issues the Dutch EU Presidency has identified as warranting our special attention.

1. First: enlargement.
2. Second: economic competitiveness – or, as we call it, the Lisbon agenda.
3. Third: laying the ground work for negotiations on the EU's budget for 2007 to 2013. Financial negotiations are usually difficult, as you may know, being in the final stages of negotiations on new contribution scales. I call upon all participating states to act constructively in the coming weeks and months so that positive results will be achieved well before the Ministerial in Sofia.
4. The fourth priority is to move the EU agenda ahead in the areas of justice and home affairs.
5. The fifth is to give impetus to an effective external policy for the European Union, in particular, with the regions closest to the EU.

A few days ago, the EU held a summit with Ukraine. Later this year, there will be an EU-Russia summit. We hope that the summit – apart from other benefits – will provide an opportunity to discuss the recent criticism from Russia and other CIS states about the OSCE and how it carries out its tasks. I will return to this point later.

The European Union is currently intensifying its cooperation with the new neighbours of our enlarged Union. We anticipate new contractual relations based on European Neighbourhood Agreements. For this, we would like to team up with the OSCE and use the experience and expertise it has gained on the ground, over the years, in the countries concerned.

During the past years, the countries of Central Europe have implemented far-reaching internal reforms which went to the heart of their economic and political systems. At present, a similar process is beginning with the Stability and Association Process countries. The EU has gained considerable experience in the different rounds of enlargement over the past decades. This experience has taught us that appropriate attention to the human dimension is beneficial and essential.

In highlighting these issues, I am very much aware that the European Union shares many interests, principles and values with the OSCE. The OSCE plays a crucial role in promoting security and cooperation in the wider European region. It provides a regional political forum which extends to the EU's partners in Central Asia. The OSCE has unparalleled practical expertise in promoting democracy, human rights and post-conflict rehabilitation. And the OSCE has become an ever more important partner in the fight against terrorism and cross-border crime. In this respect – as in others – the cooperation with our Mediterranean and Asian partners is of key importance.

(The three T's)

Mr. Chairman,

As we look ahead to the scope for enhanced cooperation between the EU and the OSCE, I believe that we can identify three sets of issues on which close cooperation is necessary. First are the three T's: terrorism, trafficking and tolerance. Second, we must work together on a number of regional issues. Third, we must take up – jointly and with some urgency – the need for reforms.

I mentioned the three T's together because I believe that fighting terrorism, combating trafficking and promoting tolerance are part of the same struggle – an epic struggle to defend fundamental freedoms and respect for human rights on behalf of individuals and society. Terrorism, crime and intolerance undermine our societies.

The EU and the OSCE have both drawn up security strategies to guide us in dealing with the unprecedented threats we now confront – global in scope, and potentially catastrophic in outcome. It is our job to work together in countering the threats and challenges that we and our children face and to do so with great determination and focus. Clearly, both the EU's security strategy and the OSCE's threats and challenges strategy will be important frameworks for action in the coming years.

The first "T": terrorism. The fight against terrorism has become an urgent priority for the European Union. The terrorist attacks in Madrid on 11 March this year destroyed any lingering illusions some Europeans may have had that Europe would be safe from terrorism. It is one thing to be conscious of one's vulnerability but altogether different to be an actual target. And we know that terrorists are prepared to commit other murderous acts. The attacks in Ingushetia on 21 and 22 June are a case in point.

Over the coming months, the EU will continue to improve and tighten up its anti-terrorist measures. The EU coordinator in this field, my compatriot Gijs de Vries, addressed the Annual Security Review Conference last month to brief you about these measures and to discuss them. Still, I cannot stress strongly enough the urgency with which the European Union is improving its internal security and anti-terrorism cooperation.

The second "T": trafficking. Measures taken in the fight against terrorism are also relevant to another ongoing struggle – the fight against trafficking in human beings, many of whom end up, effectively, as slaves. The Special Representative on Human Trafficking deserves all the support the OSCE states can muster to combat this dreadful crime with determination. I am pleased to say that you are not alone in the struggle. Trafficking has become an important issue for the European Union as well. Within the EU, an expert group on human trafficking has been created which will make recommendations to the European Commission. In early 2005, the Commission will formulate proposals for concrete EU-wide action.

The third "T", tolerance: The fight against terrorism and crime must not be waged at the expense of our tolerance for religious and cultural differences. If in the fight against terrorism we lower our human rights standards, we will defeat ourselves. We should not give in to such temptations because that would be exactly what terrorists

are trying to provoke us into doing. The promotion of tolerance is in our own interest. We are faced with news every day about violent incidents in many EU countries. This strengthens my view that our conferences and meetings on racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination must receive systematic institutional follow-up.

(Regional issues)

My second point on EU-OSCE cooperation concerns regional issues. Many of these still require close cooperation between the EU and the OSCE. The conflict over Transnistria, for instance, puts a brake on the economic and political development of Transnistria and the people who live there. As with the conflicts in the South Caucasus, its effects are felt beyond the immediate area. Too often, conflict areas effectively turn into safe havens for criminals and traffickers. The European Union strongly supports the Chairmanship in its efforts to achieve a negotiated political settlement in Moldova.

The EU stands ready to become more directly engaged in the settlement process. Earlier this week I discussed Moldova with Mr Passy and we agreed that the EU and the OSCE will team up and fully coordinate our efforts.

It would also be disastrous if the positive effects of Georgia's Revolution of the Roses were to be wiped out by developments in South Ossetia. Georgia has chosen the path of democratisation and has already made much progress. The EU calls on all concerned parties to refrain from any action which might further destabilise the situation.

In this context, I would also like to mention Kosovo. The tragic events of last March serve as a reminder of the close relationship between promoting tolerance and maintaining peace and security.

In Kosovo, the OSCE should be involved in discussions on the future of the political process. Both the EU and the OSCE should remain alert and prevent developments from again taking a negative turn this year. The upcoming discussion on redefining UNMIK's role will have consequences for our efforts. The reforms should be carried out as soon as possible.

Another regional issue about which I believe the EU and the OSCE should maintain close contact is Belarus. The EU is carefully monitoring developments there in the run-up to the October parliamentary elections. We call upon the authorities in Belarus to make sure the elections are free and fair. We expect Belarus to issue a timely invitation to ODIHR to observe the elections.

The EU welcomes the progress in several countries in Central Asia. Reforms there are essential to the further development of the entire region and its integration into the world economy. We regret that the same level of progress was not achieved across Central Asia, particularly in the area of human rights. We are grateful for President Ahtisaari's continued involvement. Once again, we call on the countries in Central Asia to work for full compliance with their OSCE commitments, and in doing so, to strengthen their own regional cooperation.

(Reforms)

Mr Chairman,

I now come to the third priority area of EU-OSCE cooperation: reforms in the OSCE. Like all other international organisations, the OSCE must effect reform if it is to remain relevant for its members. A relevant organisation is one which helps us to deal with the threats and challenges of the twenty-first century.

In this context, allow me to say a few words about the CIS declaration on the OSCE. The EU considers the declaration an invitation for in-depth exchange on the need for reforms and believes that such a discussion should take into account the existing OSCE acquis. One of the OSCE's key assets is the unique three-dimensional play between norms and standards, and between the institutions which formulate them and the missions that help to implement them.

The increased cooperation and coordination between the Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Cooperation is a good example of how to make optimal use of our assets.

The EU is fully prepared to enter into an open discussion on the organisation's performance and the need for reforms. We look forward to specific proposals for reforms from the CIS countries, on which they believe consensus can be reached among the participating states.

The position of the Secretary General is a case in point. I believe that the OSCE and its participating states would benefit if the position and the role of the Secretary General were strengthened.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the current Secretary General, Mr Kubis, for his tireless efforts to strengthen and rejuvenate the OSCE. His dedication to the organisation is inspiring. But, Mr Kubis, as you have not yet left, we ask that you continue your work with the same enthusiasm you have shown so far. I am sure that you would agree, Mr Kubis, that it is important for the OSCE to begin the search for your successor without delay. The EU is prepared to engage in discussions about the profile for this position.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to express our appreciation for the work of the current chairman-in-office, Mr Passy. Last year, the Netherlands was in the same position as Bulgaria is today. Although I was not personally involved, I know from my predecessor, Mr Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, what that work entails. I wish to compliment Mr Passy on his tireless efforts and achievements so far.

The Bulgarian chairmanship still has a lot to do. The agenda is demanding. Still, judging by the ability and energy which our able Bulgarian Chairman-in-Office and his team have shown, I am confident that the OSCE can cope. The OSCE can continue to count on the European Union as a reliable partner. We will strengthen our cooperation where possible and look forward to a successful ministerial meeting in Sofia.