

Address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia,

H.E. Ján Kubiš

at the 703rd meeting of the Permanent Council
on 28 February 2008

Dear Chairman-in-Office, Dear Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure for me to be back again on the soil of the Organization with which I spent much of my life. This time let me use this unique opportunity to address you as chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In doing so, I would like to highlight some points.

The Council of Europe has its irreplaceable position in recent democratic Europe. As a guardian of common values - democracy, rule of law and human rights - it reminds its Member States of their existing commitments and constantly provides them with new ideas, guidelines and norms that lead to greater unity, better future and life of citizens. Alongside the Council of Europe there is the OSCE with its vast and outstanding experience in daily work on the spot in the Participating States. I am sure there is no need to pursue this description further.

At the same time, we have to bear in mind the different character of instruments the Organizations use in their daily work. The Council of Europe uses legally binding texts to promote and pursue its values whereas the OSCE obliges the states by strong and longstanding political commitments. The different scope of membership should neither be neglected.

The strengthening of co-operation with other international organizations, and in particular the OSCE, is one of the priorities of Slovak Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. We firmly believe that promoting such co-operation is essential to achieve our common objective to protect human rights and promote democracy and the rule of law. The challenges to these values are so numerous and important that we cannot afford to act in an uncoordinated manner, at the risk of taking contradictory initiatives.

When comparing the activities of our two institutions we very often highly value the positive signs of complementarities and synergy. On the other hand we must honestly admit that there are also signs of overlaps. We should use joint efforts to avoid the occurrence of these signs.

To reinforce each other it is necessary to pool our respective expertise and strengths: the Council of Europe with its unique role in the standard-setting field and the monitoring of the application of these standards, and the OSCE with its long-standing experience in the field. The Joint Declaration adopted by our two institutions in 2005 to enhance their co-operation has led to a number of concrete and positive steps. Therefore, there have already been many areas where co-operation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe works well.

For example, the ODIHR and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe work closely together, through practical initiatives, to promote tolerance, non-discrimination and mutual understanding.

Regarding the fight against trafficking human beings, the OSCE Special Representative in charge of this question has also established excellent working relations with the organs of the Council of Europe. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities also maintains close contacts with different Council of Europe institutions, in particular the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Besides co-operation in the four priority areas that were identified in 2005, I will further mention the excellent working relations which exist between the ODIHR and the Venice Commission in the area of electoral assistance, notably through joint expert reviews of electoral codes.

Another illustration is the day-to-day co-operation developed on the ground between the field missions of the OSCE and the Council of Europe offices in a number of countries on different projects related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. I personally had a chance to experience the synergy effect of such co-operation when I met the representatives of the OSCE and the Council of Europe based in Belgrade and Priština during my visit in

December 2007. Another good example is the co-operation of representatives of our institutions in Armenia who I personally met in Yerevan last Monday.

Allow me to focus your attention also on two concrete events of the Slovak Chairmanship that will be marked with an active participation of the OSCE representatives: conference on the anniversaries of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages organized in Strasbourg on 11 March 2008, and a conference on the education of Roma children and youth and their integration into the school system in April 2008 in Bratislava.

As noted by the Co-ordination Group, which oversees the development of co-operation in the four priority areas, this positive trend must be maintained and amplified particularly through the organization of an increasing number of joint activities, taking account of the differences in mandate and membership between the two organizations. I hope that the next meeting of the Group on 14 March in Vienna will be an opportunity to put on record further progress.

However, beyond the reinforcement of co-operation at the technical level, it is very important that a similar trend is developed at the political level. My attendance at the meeting of the Permanent Council today is a concrete illustration of this. I know that the Secretary General of the OSCE is planning to address the Committee of Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe soon. This is a welcome step towards better interaction between our institutions.

Beyond these ad hoc exchanges, we should not lose sight of the high-level "2+2"/"3+3" meetings, which take place at regular intervals to review questions of mutual political interest between the leaders of the two organizations. These meetings are important occasions to foster our co-operation and we must ensure that we maximize the benefits that we can draw from them.

These all are the proofs of both organizations' complementarities we appreciate. On the other hand we are sometimes lacking to acknowledge a substantive overlap in their activities. Preventing duplications will remain the greatest challenge ahead of us. That is why

these two organizations should not just coordinate their activities but rather to think of giving them up in favor of the other.

To support these reflections some further consideration can be made. The Council of Europe and the OSCE may share the lead in different areas of responsibilities where the activities of one Organization would come to complement the work of the other.

These are the observations that I wanted to make on the question of co-operation with the Council of Europe. You can count on my personal dedication, both in my capacity as Chairman of this organization and as former Secretary General of the OSCE, to work towards greater synergy between the two institutions.

Thank you for your kind attention.