

**Address by H.E. Dr. Dimitrij Rupel,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia
Mediterranean Partners Group for Co-operation
3 December 2006**

ENGLISH only

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Mediterranean dimension has been part of the OSCE from the beginning. For Slovenia as a Mediterranean country this element is very important. We believe that co-operation during the past years has demonstrated that our relations are becoming closer and stronger.

In 2006, important work has been conducted under Spanish leadership of the Contact Group. It provided a balanced rolling schedule for discussion, concentrated on all three dimensions, with particular focus on the issues highlighted as priorities by the Contact Group: tolerance and non-discrimination and migration, as well as political-military issues.

We were impressed by the Contact Group organizing a side event at the Prague Economic Forum on Transportation. The side event revealed that members of the Contact Group have much in common, and that they all face similar challenges relating to the improvement of the regional transport infrastructure as a means of promoting economic development. The hope was expressed that discussion would continue and that enhanced dialogue would lead to concrete forms of cooperation on this issue among all Mediterranean Partners.

We were also pleased to see prominent engagement of Partners in the issues of tolerance and non-discrimination, especially during the debate on the controversial cartoons with caricatures of Prophet Mohammed, which showed that the Mediterranean Partners have a valuable contribution to make to the development of the debate in the OSCE context.

We were particularly pleased with the kind offer of Egypt to host the 2006 Mediterranean Seminar for the fourth time, and its selection of a topic that is both relevant and timely. It is evident that the Mediterranean Partners are now fully involved in all spheres of OSCE activity. The time has come to begin implementing the many recommendations that have been made, starting from the Harkonen Report and the Rabat Seminar, which took place during the Slovenian Chairmanship of the Contact Group. The outcome of the Mediterranean Seminar are a number of issues, and extensive debate will be needed next year on what steps to take to add meat to the bone of the Mediterranean dialogue.

Slovenia, together with the Belgian Chairmanship and the Troika Member Spain, devoted considerable efforts to achieve consensus on establishing a Partnership Fund. Unfortunately, the time was premature, and it will be left to Spain next year to try and muster the agreement of participating States on this issue. However, it may be worth considering whether we want to start with one individual project sponsored with voluntary funds to show participating States that there is a need and political support for conducting activities with the Mediterranean Partners

through voluntary contribution. Regrettably, the excellent Egyptian proposal to hold a side event for NGOs at the margins of the Mediterranean Seminar did not materialize, but it may be worth considering holding a dedicated meeting between the NGOs from the OSCE region and those from the Mediterranean. This meeting could be held under the aegis of the Secretary General in Vienna (or in another country willing to host it) and sponsored with voluntary contributions.

Slovenian government attributes great significance to the potential establishment of a Mediterranean University, as mentioned in the March 2005 Report of the Committee on Improving the Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly. Such an international institution would represent a very appropriate intellectual and scientific meeting point of European, Islamic and other cultures of the Mediterranean, which is a region of strategic importance for global peace. Thanks to its central location – at the meeting point between the North and the South, the East and the West of the whole area of Europe and the Mediterranean – Slovenia would make the ideal country for the seat of such a university.

Thank you.