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At OSCE Copenhagen Anniversary Conference on

“20 years of the OSCE Copenhagen Document: Status and future perspectives”

Copenhagen, June 10, 2010

- As it has been stressed many times today, the Copenhagen document set a benchmark, a standard we have to look upon in Human rights area. It has helped us (countries of Central Europe) to get through a difficult period of transformation from totalitarianism to democracy. However, although many post-communist countries today build democratic, prosperous and vibrant societies based on the respect of HR's, fundamental freedoms and promotion of democratic institutions and freedom of media, there is still a good number of OSCE participating States which need to do a lot more to be able to call themselves democratic. And as a rule less democracy, less recognition of CD commitments mean more tension, more instability and even potential conflicts. We should utilize the window of opportunity provided by warming atmosphere and Corfu dialogue to return back on the track laid down by in Copenhagen and redouble our efforts to overcome gaps in democracy building across the whole OSCE area.
- I hope that one of the messages of this conference will be the recognition of the continuing relevance of the Copenhagen Document for our internal and inter-state policies and the need to reenergize ourselves in meeting all criteria as outlined in it.
- The Copenhagen Document brought particular breakthrough in international standard-setting, including in the area of national minority issues. The document broadly defines human rights of persons belonging to national minorities and obligations of participating states towards their citizens who belong to minority groups.
- Slovakia, as a multiethnic country, was strongly inspired by this document. The criteria contained therein have found their reflection in our national legislation concerning the protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The same can be said about other OSCE commitments regarding minorities that have been elaborated after Copenhagen.
- The importance of national minority issues for a security and stability of the entire CSCE/OSCE area was further reflected by the creation of the High Commissioner on National Minorities in Helsinki in 1992. We very much value this important OSCE institution; we highly appreciate the work of current HCNM, his predecessors as well as

teams around them. We recognize the HCNM as the most effective tool of preventive diplomacy and early action. In addition, we strongly support his efforts in further improvement of the OSCE *acquis* in the field of minority rights. Who else then the HCNM should know the best how to strengthen the norms regarding the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in order to reflect the dynamic developments in the OSCE since beginning of 90-ies?

- The work of HCNM since its establishment reflects how dynamic and sensitive national minority issues have been not only regarding relations between the states and their citizens belonging to national minorities, but also among the states.
- The Copenhagen document clearly sets the scene for the qualitative development of national minorities. Against the background of deteriorating situation in Balkans and S. Caucasus it was really visionary and timely that participating States adopted a set of measures, the implementation of which would ensure equality of persons belonging to NM with other citizens. Today, we have learned quite well that ignorance of minority rights can inevitably lead to raising tensions and even conflicts.
- On the other hand, overall development since early 90-ies demonstrated that the high standard of minority rights has to go hand-in-hand with the high level of cooperation among participating States on questions relating to national minorities. The Copenhagen Document already stated that none of the commitments may be implemented as implying the right to engage in activity in contradiction of the purpose and principles of the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act, including the principle of territorial integrity of States. When promoting the minority rights we always have to have in mind the essential need for preserving the fine balance between rights and obligations and the need to ensure that their implementation is taking place in line with cooperative dialogue between so called kin-States and States of minority residence.
- In this respect, let me refer to the most recent set of HCNM recommendations - Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations - which provide for clearer rules and standards for OSCE participating States in their bilateral communication on national minorities.
- There are many examples and not very encouraging trends in the OSCE area, which demonstrate that there is a need to look deeper on how to better ensure the link between the legitimate interest of kin-States to promote and support of minorities residing in other States on one hand and maintenance of peace and stability through cooperation and respect to sovereign rights of States over their territory and citizens on the other. We are firmly convinced that setting up clear rules of inter-state communication and behavior on national minority issues as political commitments would be a strong contribution to stability and security of the OSCE area.

- Therefore, Slovakia fully supports HCNM's efforts to strengthen the status of Bolzano/Bozen recommendations by endorsing them as political commitments. We believe that the time has come that we commit ourselves to respect Bolzano/Bozen *en bloc* and add them to the OSCE *acquis*.