



Statement

by

the Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Terry Davis

at

the 13th Session of the OSCE Ministerial Council

LJUBLJANA

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Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2004 was generally depicted as a year of change. 2005 can perhaps best be described as a year of consolidation.

In 2005, the OSCE has focused on the follow-up to the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons, the UN organised a World Summit in the wake of the Report of the Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, and a Summit of Heads of States and Governments mapped out the way ahead for the Council of Europe.

The Summit reaffirmed the core role of the Council of Europe in developing democracy, defending human rights, advancing the rule of law, and more generally promoting the values of democratic culture, tolerance, justice and social cohesion. This can only be achieved through collective and shared responsibility, based on agreed standards and on the political, judicial and other mechanisms which have been established to oversee respect for these standards.

The Summit adopted an ambitious Action Plan, which put strong emphasis on democracy through the creation of the Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy, with the task of advancing participatory democracy, and the establishment of a Centre for Local Government Expertise in order to enhance the performance of democratic institutions at local and regional levels.

The Summit also gave new impetus to our work on culture, and in particular in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, both inside Europe and with our neighbours in Central Asia and around the Mediterranean basin.

Two new conventions on the fight against terrorism – one aimed at its prevention and another at the financing of terrorism – and a third convention on trafficking in human beings, were opened for signature.

Together with a decision to set up a Group of Wise Persons, to secure the effectiveness of the European Human Rights Court in the longer term, these were the highlights of the Summit which, however, also laid great stress on the need for co-operation and co-ordination with our partner organisations, including, of course, the OSCE.

Mr Chairman,

Looking at the list of draft decisions before you today, we see very clearly that our Heads of State and Government (who, as you know, also represent 46 of your participating States) were right.

Trafficking in human beings, migration, human rights education and training, tackling transnational organised crime, intolerance and discrimination, defending and extending human rights and the rule of law in criminal justice systems - the subjects of only a few

of the decisions you will be taking today - are all areas in which the Council of Europe has long-standing and highly developed experience and expertise.

I say this to underline the need for us to work together, not only to avoid duplication and make the best use of scant resources, but also because in the present climate in Europe the people in our member or participating countries will not understand if we do not organise and co-ordinate our activities in a sensible way.

For this reason, I warmly welcome the Declaration on Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE which was signed during the Warsaw Summit, as well as the ongoing work of the Joint Co-ordination Group which has identified four priority areas: the fight against terrorism, protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, action against trafficking in human beings, and the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

In fact, our co-operation is much broader and exists not only at Headquarters level but also in the field. In addition to terrorism-related issues and organised crime, we are also working together in areas such as media, local government assistance and education, including history teaching, as well as citizenship and human rights education.

Another good example is our co-operation to help improve the situation of Roma and Sinti. In this context, the OSCE has, of course, been invited to the first Plenary Assembly of the European Roma and Travellers Forum which will take place in Strasbourg next week with the support of the Council of Europe.

We work together because the Council of Europe and the OSCE share the same concerns about the future of Europe and have the common goal of making our continent a better, safer and fairer place.

Our aim is to bolster human rights, democracy and the rule of law because they are the lifeblood of political stability, good governance and economic development.

I therefore decided, a fortnight ago, to open a formal inquiry into reports suggesting that terrorist suspects may have been secretly detained in, or transported through, a number of Council of Europe member states. In this inquiry, I am using the powers vested in me under Article 52 of the European Convention on Human Rights and I am formally requesting information from all the governments of the High Contracting Parties.

This will allow the Council of Europe to examine how governments are ensuring respect for the Convention in the context of the fight against terrorism.

I understand that this sensitive issue will also be touched on during an intense week of transatlantic dialogue, which has just started. I very much hope that frank and constructive exchanges will not only clear the skies but also help to remove any obstacles preventing full access of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture to any place in Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro) where persons are deprived of their liberty.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe have also worked and are working as partners in the field in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, in Albania, in Serbia and Montenegro including Kosovo, and in Moldova.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe share the same concerns regarding, for instance, the South Caucasus. We are closely following all developments with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. 2006 will be crucial for the settlement of conflict in the region.

There are, of course, many other challenges, hopes, and expectations awaiting us in 2006 as Bosnia undertakes constitutional reform, as Kosovo moves towards its future status, as Moldova grapples with its domestic problems and as the newly-elected Chechen Parliament establishes its authority

Time prevents me from talking about all these matters in detail. I will therefore conclude by emphasising that security and stability across our continent require common action in order to face up to the manifold threats and challenges facing our societies today. The Council of Europe, for its part, stands ready to work with the OSCE and other partner organisations so as to make Europe a safer and more secure home for its 800 million inhabitants.