

Building Europe: agenda for a dream

**Statement by Mr Walter SCHWIMMER,
Secretary General of the Council of Europe,
at the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

Vienna, 22 July 2004

I. The European dream

Mr Chairman, Mr Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe is a strange continent. Despite its huge variety, this smallest of the continents has achieved an unmistakable cultural identity. More than 50 years ago, a handful of Europeans dared to share their European dream with the rest of the world. The Council of Europe, the European Union and the OSCE were created to help that dream come true. The dream of a few has today become the dream of more than 800 million people. This is essential because, as Vaclav Havel once said: "without dreaming of a better Europe, we shall never build a better Europe".

Europe is changing. This year 10 new countries joined the European Union. This autumn the Council of Europe will welcome its 46th member State. NATO too has expanded and the OSCE has included a new Asian Partner.

This is all good news because it means an ever greater number of countries are reaffirming and deepening their commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law which are at the heart of the Organisation which I have had the privilege to serve during five years.

However for all its historic significance the expansion of the European Union or the Council of Europe cannot be seen as an objective in itself, either for the acceding countries or for the Organisations themselves.

Ultimately the success of our endeavours will not be measured by the number of our member States but by the degree to which they all live up to the principles and values of the organisation.

Promoting the commitments to which our member States aspire is a responsibility shared by all international organisations which are involved in defending democracy and human rights. That is why I am with you today.

Mr Chairman, this is the last time I shall be addressing the Permanent Council as Secretary General of the Council of Europe. I have been proud and honoured to share with you both commitments and results. In the minutes that follow, I will focus on the challenges ahead and will express a wish for the future.

II. The dreamer's agenda: a Europe for all and by all

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe is a continent with specific needs and ambitions that must be addressed at Pan-European level. More than 800 million citizens legitimately aspire to become an active part of a society that respects their human dignity and that they can trust.

Trust in the present and trust in the future can only be achieved if all actors in Europe (both at national and international level) are committed to democracy and social justice. The additional step needed (from commitments to real progress) implies setting **a single agenda for the continent** where priorities are identified and progress monitored. This agenda is a truly public agenda with a leitmotif: "A Europe for all and by all".

Our agenda for 2005 and beyond should contain three elements:

1. More visible recognition of our core values
2. Effective implementation of the standards that we have set together
3. A strategy for reinforced co-operation between intergovernmental organizations

1. More visible recognition of the core values shared by our members States

In 2001 Armenia and Azerbaijan joined the CoE simultaneously. In 2002 Bosnia and Herzegovina followed suit and in April 2003 we welcomed Serbia and Montenegro. This completed the accession of all South East European countries to our Organisation and contributed a lot to democratic stability in the Balkans. It will also facilitate the implementation of the strategy of further European integration for these countries.

The way for Monaco's accession as the 46th member state of the Council of Europe is also open. The negotiations for a new Convention to replace the 1930 instrument have been concluded and it will be up to the Committee of Ministers to formally invite Monaco to join the Council of Europe and to fix the date of accession this autumn.

The completion of the enlargement of the Council of Europe will consolidate its role as a pan-European organisation offering a unique platform for political dialogue and a wide spectrum of co-operation in the fields of human rights, the rule of law, democratic governance, as well as culture, education and social cohesion, both at parliamentary and inter-governmental levels between all European States.

Becoming a member of the Council of Europe implies **joining a community of values**. The effective abolition of the death penalty in all our member States is a good example of our continent's commitment to the protection of human dignity. A death penalty free Europe certainly is the CoE's noblest aim. The Committee of Ministers adopted a Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights on the abolition of the Death penalty in all circumstances which entered into force in July 2003. This extension of the existing ban on the death penalty in peacetime is a clear commitment of many governments to a civilized society which sets the right to life above all else. It is also a further sign of the irreversible trend towards universal abolition and one of which we may well be proud.

However, the increasing complexity of our society and the globalisation process threaten our values. It is therefore essential to recall to our citizens - and indeed to the rest of the world - the values upon which Europe is built and that we are more than ever committed to defend.

Among the priorities I mentioned in my first speech to your Council I placed special emphasis on the fact that the only way to get lasting stability in the Balkans -and that means stability in Europe- was to ensure that democracy, human rights and the rule of law became realities throughout South-Eastern Europe.

The most rewarding side of my term of office is obviously the progress we have achieved in the areas I placed among my priorities for the years 2001-2005. I would particularly like to mention:

- Greater protection of democracy and human rights for **four new member states**: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro;
- Increased dialogue **in conflict situations** and constructive assistance for Cyprus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the Balkans such as support within the framework of the Ohrid Agreement, a decentralisation concept for Kosovo, the "round table" discussions in Moldova etc;
- Implementation of legal reforms and a programme on federalism in the **Russian Federation**, CoE assistance in ensuring human rights and restoring the rule of law in the Chechen Republic;
- Enhanced **intercultural and inter-religious dialogue**, within Europe, and with the other shore of the Mediterranean, in order to foster better mutual understanding, to reduce prejudice, and to achieve universal commitment to the same fundamental values;
- Preparation of **timely legal instruments** as well as programmes and concrete action to respond to pan-European challenges such as bioethics, corruption, migration and freedom of movement, cybercrime, trafficking in human beings and terrorism. Our specific added value is our approach: **putting human dignity at the heart** of our action.

Our Organisation's capacities in these fields are directly linked to the promotion of fundamental values and basic standards through a **combination of political means**, parliamentary diplomacy, legal expertise, monitoring mechanisms, and confidence-building measures based on work with civil society, etc. One of the success stories of the last few years is certainly the Council of Europe-sponsored Schools of Political Studies. From two in 1999, their number has now grown to twelve in 2004, including a network of schools in South Eastern Europe.

But I certainly do not want to hide behind these success stories and ignore what has still to be done. For instance, the situation in the **Caucasus** has remained a major political issue on the Council of Europe agenda all these years. The most difficult challenges the three member States -Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia-face are their unresolved conflicts. Regrettably they undermine joint European efforts to assist these countries and threaten to limit the process of democratisation and the development of regional ownership which are prerequisites for further European integration.

The Council of Europe remains concerned about the situation in **Belarus**. There are still a substantial number of cases of restrictions to freedom of the media and freedom of association, as well as cases of arrest and harassment of members of the opposition and representatives of some NGOs. There are also unresolved cases of disappearance of opposition politicians. I certainly maintain my hope and wish that this very last potential candidate-country for Council of Europe membership may finally embark on genuine democratic reforms which will enable the Belarusian people to join our community of values.

Only concrete steps by the Minsk authorities will enable it to develop closer relations with the Council of Europe. The Council, for its part, remains keen to see Belarus take its rightful place in Europe, as a country with properly functioning democratic institutions, and human rights protection, with full freedom of activity for civil society representatives.

In this respect the preparation of the elections due to be held in October 2004 affords Belarus an opportunity which its authorities should not miss. Indeed, I call on them to implement the standards contained in the Code of good practice in electoral matters adopted by the CoE's Committee of Ministers. Free and fair elections would certainly constitute an important first step in a European journey that we would all support and welcome.

2. Effective implementation of the standards that we have set together

Standard-setting is a process in which multilateralism and solidarity among countries and institutions is a must. The impressive quantity of norms developed within the Council of Europe will only serve their purpose if all relevant actors are involved in their negotiation, implementation and evaluation.

The Council of Europe needs to focus on improving this process, notably through increased participation of civil society, reform of monitoring procedures and development of priority programmes to assist countries in complying with their obligations.

Monitoring is an exercise in the interest of governments and for the benefit of the people. Better targeted, more cost-efficient and ultimately more effective Council of Europe assistance is another important achievement of the past few years and it has greatly benefited from the results of the monitoring procedures. Their results show that progress is needed all over Europe. Being placed North or West on the map does not guarantee the best grades in the school of democracy. The Council of Europe's bodies and institutions (from the Parliamentary Assembly to the Human Rights Commissioner) constantly remind us of the challenges ahead and even show us the way to further progress.

3. A strategy for reinforced co-operation between intergovernmental organisations

I have always underlined that the Council of Europe, as well as the European Union, the OSCE and other regional institutions are products of the same splendid vision of European unity based on shared values and increased co-operation.

Building Europe and spreading Europe's message implies developing partnerships, dialogue and complementarity between international actors, and notably the European Union, the OSCE and the United Nations. Through its co-operation with the United Nations and its specialised agencies as well as with regional partners in different parts of the world, the Council of Europe is becoming a regional organisation with a universal message and a global outreach. We are therefore experimenting and exploring new legal and political means to achieve this, including:

- improved co-operation with the OSCE (at headquarters and in the field);
- EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, development of joint programmes with the European Union;
- increased visibility at the UN General Assembly (I was the first Council of Europe Secretary General to address it) and improved co-operation in priority fields (such as terrorism, bioethics or culture). All told, the past few years have seen significant developments in our **relations with the United Nations**.
- Meetings with regional and sub-regional mechanisms (Strasbourg 2002 and Vilnius 2003);
- development of contacts with the Arab League and the Islamic Conference, in particular to enhance intercultural and inter-religious dialogue within our societies and with our neighbours.

Mr Chairman,

Over the last years, there has been a clear trend towards more effective partnership between European institutions and concerted action to promote conflict-prevention, peace-building and the strengthening of democratic stability.

Both our Organisations, each in its own way, are promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law because they are the vital ingredients for political stability, good governance, economic development and socially sustainable societies.

Regarding our co-operation with the OSCE, it is my strong belief that the guiding principle for our interaction should be our respective comparative advantages. Co-operation should remain results-oriented. There has clearly been increased and more intense co-operation and joint activities at all levels. It is important to maintain lines of communication between our respective presences in the field and between both Headquarters. We have established a regular pattern of pragmatic contacts, consultations and exchanges of information at all levels. Our action to fight trafficking in human beings provides us with an excellent example. This issue is indeed high on the agenda of both organizations. The OSCE has just appointed a special representative and the Council of Europe is negotiating a European Convention. Tomorrow, my Deputy will come to Vienna to attend an inter-agency meeting called by the OSCE. I am convinced that our concerns will be better addressed if we deal with them together.

I also particularly welcome the initiative taken by the Norwegian Chair of the CoE CM to look into the arrangements for enhanced co-operation between our two Organisations which was discussed here in Vienna on 14 July. I am sure that, like me, my colleague, Ján Kubiš, will be pleased by the direct interest and engagement of both the Permanent Council and the Committee of Ministers in concrete measures and practical arrangements to streamline cooperation between our respective organisations.

In this context, please allow me to pay tribute to Ján Kubiš with whom it has been a pleasure to work closely over the last 5 years and to thank him for his unstinting cooperation in matters involving our two institutions.

III. Maintaining dreams high on the agenda

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance of our agenda for 2005 and beyond calls for the highest commitment in both our Organisations. I am extremely pleased to confirm that the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe member States have decided to hold their **Third Summit** in May 2005.

With a membership which will soon group 46 member States and some 800 million across our continent, the CoE has paved the way for Europe's enlargement and its on-going integration process. The CoE's **Third Summit** in Warsaw will be the opportunity:

- To provide the Organisation with a mission statement reflecting the statutory objective of 1949 to achieve greater unity among member states;
- To confirm the continuation of the CoE's essential work in the further development of normative instruments, including a comprehensive and efficient monitoring procedure of compliance with their obligations **by all** member states;
- To provide guidelines for a Europe of complementarity and partnership with the expanding European Union, the OSCE and other international organisations to affirm the unity of purpose of the different European mechanisms and reduce the risk of new divisions in Europe;
- To provide, a **"Europe for all"** action plan to build a safer society (by fighting terrorism, trafficking and organised crime, as well as protecting the most vulnerable), a more inclusive society (with transfrontier co-operation, free movement, and the promotion of a multi-cultural society) and a genuinely democratic society (by enhancing human rights, promoting good governance and fostering democratic citizenship).

The Third Summit which will be held a few days after the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II could mark the end not only of the post world war but also of the post cold war period. It could be the beginning of an era of a Europe of equal partners, equal duties and equal rights for all our nations.

The Europe of the 3rd Summit should be

- an undivided Europe of shared values enjoying a common cultural heritage
- **a Europe** of willing co-operation
- a Europe of partners where the problems and concerns of one are the concerns of all
- a Europe of social solidarity
- a Europe freed from tyranny
- a Europe of democratic security

Such a comprehensive agenda of "A Europe for all and by all" is based on the CoE's unique potential and tools, including its action and interaction at intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary, local and regional government and civil society levels, as well as its role as a forum for political dialogue and co-operation where all European democracies come together on an equal footing.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion let me express **my wish** for the **future of the Council of Europe** as I see it.

In my view, the future should start with a return to the Council's origins. Article 1 of the Statute of our Organisation reads "The aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its Members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress". Fifty five years ago, the founding fathers of the Council of Europe shared their dream of a greater democratic and peaceful Europe without dividing lines. We have today a Europe from Reykjavik to Vladivostok, but there are also new dividing lines on the horizon. There is therefore still work to be done, and we still need the clarity of vision and the courage of our convictions to make it happen and to make it work.

I therefore wish that, soon, the CoE will cover all 47 states in Europe, united on the basis of a common cultural and natural heritage, sharing a political identity based on full compliance with the common values of pluralist democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Together, we are stronger. We have a better chance to succeed in rising to the challenges we face. We must fight threats like terrorism, trafficking in human beings, trafficking in organs, organised crime and corruption together. We must continue to assist countries still in transition to accomplish their reforms successfully. We must work together for more social cohesion, tolerance, mutual understanding, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, as a response to the common challenges to our societies and to the expectations of our fellow-citizens.

That is what is expected of us. As I said at the outset, we shall be judged on our success in making all our basic values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law a daily reality throughout our continent.

You may say I am a dreamer... but I've got an agenda!

Thank you for your attention.