

Opening Speech by
H.E Miroslav Lajcak
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic

ENGLISH only

Conference
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Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

I am indeed honoured to welcome you today to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the opening of the *Conference on Strengthening Energy Security in the OSCE Area*. The reason why Slovakia offered itself for the Chairmanship as co-organiser of this event is natural and obvious. The complete stoppage of contracted gas deliveries from the Russian Federation via the Ukrainian transit route to EU customers shocked not only Slovakia, which is fully dependent on this gas route, but also the whole of Central Europe. As I underlined during the June ministerial meeting on the island of Corfu, energy security within the OSCE area thus became not only pressing, but also vital for Slovakia.

Dear participants, in our view, which is broadly shared by other member countries, the security and reliability of energy supplies have a direct impact on overall security in Europe. This undisputable fact makes the OSCE, as a complementary security organisation, the best place to pay adequate attention to this issue. All the more so now that the OSCE has proven its worth as an ample forum for political dialogue on issues which transgress national borders, and which are of immediate relevance to broader security aspects including external energy security.

Energy security should thus become one of the core themes of the second dimension and, at the same time, a part of the unfolding debate on the future of European security. By taking on a higher profile in this area, the OSCE can become more visible and align itself more closely with the needs of the people in its member countries. I would also like to mention the direct mandate given to the Secretariat and permanent missions by the Ministerial Council of 2006 – to develop dialogue on the issues of energy security involving the producer, transit and consumer countries. I have to note with regret that Slovakia is not satisfied with the results achieved thus far under this mandate. We therefore perceive today’s conference as our contribution to the structured OSCE discussion on energy security. We want to use it to **call on the participating countries to continue dialogue using the comparative advantage of the OSCE as the only security organisation in Europe that brings together, on one platform, the key countries of production, consumption and transit of the energy media.**

In our effort to develop dialogue on the issue of energy security within the OSCE, we must not lose sight of other specialised forums. The issue of energy security encompasses a broad array of technical, technological, economic and security aspects, which are covered by a political umbrella. The role of the OSCE is not to duplicate, but rather to complement the activities of international energy organisations. It takes a declaration of political will and a quest for consensus for the necessary changes in the area of external energy security to materialise. The OSCE can become a forum which spells out such political support to the steps taken by other initiatives and organisations. By the same token, the outcome of discussions within the OSCE can serve as an example of the existing common approaches and joint interests of OSCE members.

However, for this unfolding dialogue to yield tangible benefits it should lead to the formulation of a vision and future prospects which the countries of Europe should strive to achieve in order to take the edge off any future disputes, and to prevent energy conflicts from occurring. As our recent experience has shown, the exclusive reliance in the short run on the tenet of mutual interdependence of countries along the chain of supplier to transit provider to consumer and commercial contracts do not guarantee the necessary degree of certainty. The predictability of individual players directly depends on the degree of transparency in their mutual relations. Albeit the effort to “protect proprietary information” can be understood, it should not serve as a cloak hiding the responsibility of individual players in international relations. Quite the contrary, only a clearly identifiable individual responsibility within a transparent environment can make long-term relations predictable and stable in such a sensitive area as the supply of energy undoubtedly is.

Irrespective of the priority issues for Slovakia, we also attach equal importance on a continental scale to the questions of energy efficiency and energy savings, the support to innovative technologies, and the utilisation of renewable energy sources. The degree in which these areas are developed in the OSCE economies differs from country to country. This is where we see room for the technologically advanced countries to assist those whose economies are highly energy intensive. I appreciate the fact that the conference will investigate these issues in greater detail.

Dear participants,

In conclusion of my opening remarks, let me thank the Greek chairmanship and the Secretariat for their excellent cooperation in organising the conference, and wish all the delegates fruitful and successful work and a pleasant stay in summer Bratislava.