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Statement
by Mr Samuel Žbogar,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia,
Chairman of the Committee of Ministers
of the Council of Europe,
at the Permanent Council of the OSCE
(Vienna, 4 June 2009)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the 119th Ministerial Session and on the occasion of celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe on 12 May Slovenia took over the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from Spain. The great commitment of the member states to the Council of Europe and its values and objectives was clear from the presence in Madrid: no less than 40 out of 47 states were represented by their ministers.

The priorities of the Slovenian Chairmanship are closely defined in accordance with the commitments agreed by the Heads of State and Government of at the 2005 Warsaw Summit. Slovenia will promote the realisation of the Council of Europe's core objective – to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law – as was confirmed in the Madrid Declaration. We are certainly facing challenges at this juncture in defending and promoting these values, but I am convinced that we will continue to progress together.

Strengthening cooperation with other international organisations – and in particular the OSCE – is one of the priorities of Slovenia's Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. Cooperation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE is of crucial importance in achieving long-term and sustainable security and stability in Europe. Both organisations – despite the differences in organisational structure and membership – are based on same values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These values are essential

ingredients in the upgrading of European security. Slovenia will therefore continue to promote close contacts between the two organisations.

The challenges to the values that our organisations defend are so numerous that we must act in a coordinated manner to pool our respective expertise and strengths and thus reinforce each other: the Council of Europe with its unique role in the standard-setting field and the monitoring of the application of these standards, and the OSCE with its long-standing experience in the field.

Successful cooperation between our organisations is based on regular meetings at different levels, from the annual 2+2/3+3 high-level meetings and the meetings of the OSCE and CoE coordination groups to the meetings of both Secretaries General and the contacts of experts at various conferences and seminars. Such meetings represent important occasions helping us to further foster our collaboration, and we need to maximise all the benefits we can draw from them.

The Slovenian Chairmanship of the Council's Committee of Ministers proposed to the OSCE Chairmanship to hold a 2+2 meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September and to assure a follow-up to the conclusions made at the meeting. We hope that at the next 2+2 meeting the Council of Europe will be represented by a new Secretary General.

Slovenia warmly welcomes the good cooperation between the institutions and bodies of the CoE and the OSCE, and fully supports their work and endeavours. Election monitoring is yet another important area of cooperation between the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council. This joint endeavor has proven remarkably successful, because it has been consistently conducted in the spirit of partnership. Let me in this connection emphasize that the Slovenian Chairmanship of the Council highly values the work performed by ODIHR, especially its methodology and its professionalism. In this context, we should not forget the excellent collaboration between the ODIHR and the Venice Commission with regard to reviewing national legislations and assistance in the preparation of legislative reforms. Furthermore, several other OSCE institutions have built up valuable contacts with various CoE partners, for example the Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Representative on Freedom of the Media or the High Commissioner on National Minorities. Here, one also cannot overlook the significance of good contacts between the Council of Europe's offices and the OSCE missions who together contribute to concrete in-field results in a range of projects relating to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

During the Slovenian OSCE Chairmanship in 2005, the Council of Europe and the Organisation adopted a Joint Declaration aimed at enhancing their cooperation, increasing synergies and avoiding duplication. The Declaration has led to a number of concrete and positive steps in this direction. At its meeting held in March in Vienna, the Coordination Group which oversees the development of cooperation in the four priority areas that were identified in 2005 – namely the fight against terrorism, protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, combating trafficking in human beings, and promoting tolerance and non-discrimination – welcomed the progress made. The Slovenian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers will strive to maintain and strengthen this positive trend, having in mind the differences in the mandate and membership of the two organisations, increasing synergies and avoiding duplications. I believe that the 10th meeting of the Group, to be held on 11 September 2009 in Strasbourg, will be a good opportunity to put further progress on record. Beyond the reinforcement of cooperation at the technical level, it is very important that a similar course is maintained also at the political level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I am sure you are well aware, one of the main challenges for the Council of Europe is to consolidate the long-term effectiveness of its system of human rights protection. Slovenia welcomes the fact that some very concrete decisions were taken in Madrid to improve the situation of the European Court of Human Rights. During our Chairmanship, this file will be constantly under review and we hope that significant progress can be reached.

Our Chairmanship will also pay special attention to the strengthening of the rule of law and to the promotion of its development at both national and international levels. Many of the activities and conferences that we have planned in this context are also geared to bringing the Court's backlog down in the long-term perspective. As far as the rule of law is concerned, the Council's cooperation with the OSCE remains of utmost importance.

We wish to emphasize the positive approach to minority protection and to shaping of minority policy as well as to the issue of protection of Roma and Travellers – or, as they are called by the OSCE, Roma and Sinti. Slovenia is conscious of the significance and complexity of these issues for security and stability in Europe, and is promoting the idea of a pluralistic society based on respect, tolerance and mutual understanding in both organisations. Within the CoE and the OSCE we are trying to encourage activities focused on improving the situation of Roma in Europe, above all in the sense of awareness-raising and

fostering the education of Roma children. I would therefore like to bring your attention to the international conference 'The Education of Roma: Achievements, Opportunities and Future Challenges' that took place in Slovenia on 25 and 26 May. We will also organise an international conference on the status of minorities in Slovenia and the status of Slovenes living abroad.

We will actively promote children's rights within the Council of Europe's programme 'Building a Europe for and with Children'. Special emphasis will be placed on combating all forms of violence against children. Slovenia supports the launching of the Council of Europe Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence in June, and would like these guidelines to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers during our Chairmanship.

Based on the success of the pilot project for the promotion of the rights of the child which Slovenia conducted for 66,000 children, including the children of national minorities in many participating states, in 17 languages within the OSCE area during our 2005 Chairmanship, we will implement a human rights education project for children entitled 'Our Rights' also during our Council of Europe Chairmanship. Through this activity we wish to contribute to systematic education on children's rights within school curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Ossetia in the Russian Federation, this time for some 50,000 children. On 6 and 7 October 2009, the Slovenian Parliament will host a high-level international conference on the rights of the child and the right to protection against violence.

Another Slovenia's priority is the fight against terrorism, corruption and organised crime, including trafficking in human beings, while promoting the Council of Europe instruments on bioethics and biomedicine, and raising awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities will also be in the focus.

Slovenia appreciates the decision of the Greek OSCE Chairmanship to focus on migration as the main theme of this year's Economic and Environmental Forum; migration was a central topic also during the Slovenian OSCE Chairmanship in 2005. In the current financial crisis, migration represents a particularly urgent issue since increasing unemployment predominantly affects migrant workers. As a result of the crisis, the receiving countries already experience rising intolerance and stigmatization of migrants. As the CoE chairing country Slovenia will carefully monitor this area and strive for a joint effort of all key international players to alleviate the consequences of the crisis.

We will pay special attention to the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Belarus. Here, I have

to recall how significantly the CoE offices and the OSCE missions in South-Eastern Europe contribute to maintaining stability, developing democracy and assisting countries there in the fulfilment of their plans and endeavours to join Euro-Atlantic structures.

Our aim is to include South-Eastern Europe in all Council's activities. In this context, we will also focus on intercultural dialogue and on the coexistence of different cultures. Special attention will be devoted to cultural heritage, while we intend to organise a follow-up conference of the so-called Ljubljana Process for the protection of cultural heritage in South-Eastern Europe.

A number of decisions were adopted at the Ministerial Session under the item 'The Council of Europe and the conflict in Georgia'. The Committee of Ministers underlined the importance of restoring democracy, human rights and the rule of law in all areas affected by the conflict, in line with the Council of Europe's values and standards. The Ministers invited the Secretary General to submit projects for further activities to this end, paying particular attention to the need for coordination with other international organisations, and bearing in mind the positive role that can be played by civil society and NGOs in this context.

Furthermore, the Ministers expressed their concern about human rights protection and humanitarian situation of all persons affected by the conflict in Georgia, offered their active support to the activities of the Commissioner for Human Rights and to the full implementation of his six-point Action Plan, and called upon all those concerned to facilitate and grant access by the Council of Europe and the international community to all persons affected by the conflict and in need of human rights protection.

I would like to stress that the Council of Europe is building up capacities in Georgia. Although our presence in the country is modest, it provides a basis for future cooperation. In the period November–December 2008, the Council of Europe organised training for the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) on human rights standards and monitoring. This was highly appreciated, but with the rotation of monitors and the EUMM's continued presence, further training on human rights and monitoring may be needed.

Slovenia regrets the fact that no agreement has yet been reached on further OSCE's presence in Georgia which is essential for stability and security in the region. We are in favour of the recommendations made by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) with respect to human rights situation in Georgia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding, allow me to mention Belarus, which is still not a member of the Council of Europe. As was pointed out at the ministerial meeting in Madrid, we all look forward to the day Belarus is ready to join – meeting the requirements of the Statute. Slovenia will follow-up on the initiatives taken by previous Council chairmanships in this respect. I will personally attend the opening of the Information Office of the Council of Europe in Minsk next week, which represents a step forward in strengthening cooperation between Belarus and the Council of Europe. I hope that the Information Office will become a genuine platform for cooperation with Belarus. The Council of Europe would greatly welcome the support from the OSCE Mission in Minsk for the organisation of joint activities.

These are the observations I wanted to make on the priorities of the Slovenian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and on our mutual cooperation aimed at creating even more synergies between the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe.

Thank you for your attention.