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German Presidency of the European Union

Speech by
Frank-Walter Steinmeier,
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs,
at the OSCE Permanent Council
Vienna, 18 January 2007

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I gladly came to Vienna today to meet with you. The EU and the OSCE share common goals: securing peace and post-conflict reconstruction with a host of instruments and measures. I would like to say to you that we therefore intend to seek, and indeed extend, the close cooperation between the EU and the OSCE during the coming months of our EU Presidency.

May I wish you, Mr Chairman, a sure hand in tackling the truly challenging tasks ahead. You have set the right priorities in your programme. We will do everything we can to support you, for your success is our success.

If European integration is a success story then the OSCE has played an important role in that. During the Cold War, your predecessor organization, the CSCE, was one of the main fora in which East and West could come closer together. The CSCE was instrumental in helping overcome the division of Europe and allowing us Germans to reunite our country. Germany will never forget this historic contribution. And, not least, the OSCE has always been a symbol of close transatlantic relations.

Today, too, the OSCE is making an invaluable contribution towards security, stability and the rule of law. The OSCE participating states are committed to shared norms, standards and values. They stand for cooperation, conflict prevention and crisis management. These principles and adherence to these principles have brought Europe the longest period of peace in its history. The long-term confidence building which we practise is certainly regarded as a model in other regions of the world.

That is why political, personnel and financial commitment of the EU and its member states to the OSCE has been steadily growing. Since 1 January of this year, since the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the EU, with 27 of 56 states, accounts for almost half of all OSCE participating states, more than two thirds of seconded OSCE personnel and almost three quarters of the OSCE budget.

In my view, these figures are impressive; they illustrate the EU's conviction that the OSCE is the best option when it comes to securing security and cooperation in Europe and in neighbouring regions. However, we also want to make sure that the EU and the OSCE work

together as efficiently and effectively as possible, that is to say hand in hand wherever possible and, what is more avoiding a duplication of work wherever possible.

During our Presidency, we will pay particularly close attention to the EU's neighbours. In the OSCE area these are, above all, our eastern neighbours. Our plans consist of three pillars.

Firstly, during the next few months we would like to consolidate and expand the European Union's strategic partnership with Russia. Russia's transformation into a democratic state based on the rule of law and into a strong economic partner is a key task for the EU. The partnership and cooperation agreement with Russia is due to expire at the end of this year. We therefore want to prepare a new agreement which will substantially enhance the quality of our relations. That not only means the abstract development of the political dialogue. We also want to tap the potential of and, above all, give substance to our relations in the four "Common Spaces" – the economy, home affairs/justice, external relations, research/education/culture.

Secondly, we would like to intensify the European Neighbourhood Policy. Our goal is to facilitate our neighbours' access to the EU Single Market, launch innovative financing mechanisms and to forge closer contacts between people in Europe and its neighbouring regions.

One project within the context of the revised Neighbourhood Policy is the new Enhanced Agreement which the EU is striving to conclude with Ukraine. Furthermore, we have to focus more on the Black Sea states which, of course, have become the EU's direct neighbours following the accession of Romania and Bulgaria. We want to pool EU policies for the countries in this region and to coordinate them better.

Thirdly, we have decided to draw up a European initiative on Central Asia. I certainly received a positive response to this project, indeed considerable support, during my trip to the region at the end of last year. Europe has a vested interest in development and stability in Central Asia. The vicinity of Afghanistan alone shows that people in Europe will benefit directly from it. We also need Central Asia as a partner in combating drug trafficking, organized crime, illegal migration, Islamist infiltration and terrorism.

I am very pleased that immediately after gaining independence, the states of Central Asia joined the CSCE. They are part of a community which is committed to democracy, human

rights and the rule of law. Only on this basis can stability and economic development be guaranteed in the long term. The OSCE's task now is to do everything it can to ensure that these principles are translated into action and concrete policies.

The OSCE will play a central role in the EU's initiative on Central Asia. I had an opportunity when I was in Bishkek to take a good look at the work it is doing there. We would like it, the OSCE, to play a prominent role, particularly in the spheres of education, the rule of law and border management.

The EU is also aware of the OSCE's other strengths: respect for human rights and democratization, the fight against terrorism and within the OSCE's second dimension, that is to say the economy and the environment. We will use these strengths systematically for our aims.

In the southern Caucasus and in Moldova, the OSCE's efforts to bring about more security and cooperation have had little success to date. However, the most recent OSCE project in the South Ossetian region in Georgia gives cause for hope. In the OSCE development programme, economic development and confidence-building measures go hand in hand. I therefore believe there could be a chance that a basis for a settlement between the parties will be found. The EU is also very much involved here and has high expectations.

I want to state quite clearly with regard to the entire region that we must not simply accept deadlock in frozen conflicts. We should therefore expect parties to conflicts in the region to accept OSCE mediation and to regard it as an opportunity. Where there is a readiness to engage in constructive dialogue, the EU will lend whatever support it can.

The enhancement of security and stability in the western Balkans is another focus of our Presidency programme. The future status of Kosovo will be the key issue.

The general principles of the solution we are seeking are well-known: there can certainly only be stability if a sizeable majority of Kosovo Albanians find a compromise acceptable. Likewise, stability can only be established if the Serbian minority do not regard themselves as the losers.

The aim of the international community remains to create a multiethnic Kosovo in which everyone can live in freedom and security and has the chance to enjoy a bright future. It is

therefore particularly important that we further enhance the rights and protection of the non-Albanian communities. What is more, the greatest possible degree of decentralization is necessary.

President Ahtisaari has our full confidence and support in mastering his difficult tasks as mediator. I am confident that he will propose a wise solution. The two sides will then have to show goodwill and work seriously on an agreement. The international community has every right to expect this given the many years it has worked for peace and stability in the Balkans.

Whatever the final solution, Kosovo is a special case which cannot serve as a precedence for other conflict regions.

The EU is already preparing intensively to provide support in building rule-of-law structures and the police once the Kosovo status issue has been resolved. This ESDP mission will build on the many years of experience gained by the OSCE mission in Kosovo and, of course, cooperate closely with it.

At the Ministerial Council in Brussels we were able to reach agreement on the reforms aimed at strengthening the OSCE. We are grateful to the Belgian chairmanship for its professional conduct of the negotiations and for its perseverance. Belgium has brought to a conclusion a process which began under the Bulgarian chairmanship and was greatly advanced by the appointment of a Panel of Eminent Persons during the Slovenian chairmanship. They, too, deserve our express thanks and recognition.

The way has now been paved under the new Spanish OSCE chairmanship for a stronger OSCE with a higher political profile. We want to work together in a spirit of partnership with all those prepared to join us. For ensuring that everyone has an equal say in decisions, that all 56 states participate actively, is crucial to the future of our organization.

We need a frank and intensive dialogue on the basis of our common values, norms and standards. I know that this is not always pleasant. But membership of the OSCE is not without its political price. OSCE participating states can, and indeed must, address the internal affairs of other participating states on an equal basis. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has set a shining example here.

The view that the dialogue among OSCE states is all about lecturing, showing up or even denouncing is wrong. Rather, it is about pointing out to each other at an early stage problems and risks to cooperation and security in Europe. I therefore ask you to play an active role in this dialogue!

The OSCE has key institutions and instruments whose viability and efficiency we have to preserve and strengthen. I would like to mention the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, as well as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and, of course, the field and election observation missions. They all have our staunch support.

Some states react to these election observation missions with scepticism, while others reject them. They say that they are used to bring about changes of regime. I believe that such allegations are not justified. For democratic changes of government take place due to election results, not due to the monitoring of the elections.

It is important that the election observers do not just come from a few states but, rather, that the composition is as balanced as possible in geographical terms. To ensure this, however, all OSCE participating states must be prepared to second personnel. The EU will, where necessary, provide assistance.

OSCE participating states have created the strictest and best interlinked conventional arms control instruments in the world. They made a vital contribution towards the transformation processes which became necessary when the Cold War ended.

It has to be said that since the entry into force of this exemplary regime, the European security landscape has improved to an astonishing extent. The CFE Treaty and the Vienna Document now cover military potentials which can hardly be expected to jeopardize our security.

This security network has to be preserved, further developed and adapted to the progress in military technology. It remains a key element in continuous security confidence building in Europe.

We should therefore actively promote our arms control successes in other regions. I am expressly in favour of the OSCE discussing this with its cooperation partners in Asia and the Mediterranean.

The OSCE is the only forum on security policy within the pan-European context. Security and stability must be acquired again and again through political commitment and hard work.

I urge you to strive even harder to do what we have done in the past: we have to join forces to ensure that conflicts in the OSCE area are resolved, human and minority rights, the rule of law and civil society are strengthened, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance, human trafficking and terrorism are combated, energy security is guaranteed and the environment protected.

Mr Chairman,
Mr Secretary-General,
Excellencies,

I am counting on your support. The EU and the OSCE are pursuing an active peace policy. But peace, security and stability must be won and conceived again and again. I wish you all passion, drive and every success in this endeavour!