



**Statement in response to
the Address on the Priorities of the EU Presidency by H.E. Dr. Ursula Plassnik,
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria,
delivered by Ambassador Jivan Tabibian
at the 591st (Special) Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council
February 2, 2006**

Mr. Chairman,

We also welcome Madam Minister. I am sorry that this meeting was not a week ago because then I would have been able to speak in my double capacity, both as Permanent Representative of Armenia to the OSCE and as bilateral Ambassador to Austria. Unfortunately, since this week I am no longer in the bilateral capacity, therefore I have got to limit my comments to the OSCE.

Initially I had thought that our Delegation would speak about the EU's European Neighborhood Policy, but it is always very difficult to resist some comments about the relationship between the OSCE and the EU. For the last several years that we have been following this relationship, we always have had a choice between being partners, cooperators and even occasionally competitors. That is a lively issue; it will never be settled forever. It is more in the spirit, but occasionally specific acts come and maybe complicate things.

The areas where we are clearly partners and cooperators are very obvious: trafficking, gender equality, perhaps issues of the economic-environmental dimension. But each one has a comparative advantage and cannot necessarily substitute itself for the other.

There are some other dimensions, however, where some type of competition may be inevitable. At what point, at what stage either Organization gets involved in the transformation of societies in transition? Here let us say that the EU has a certain advantage: the promise of the EU membership is a great attraction, incentive, what the French call *atout*, to motivate people to follow certain instructions. For those of us who are already in the OSCE, if the OSCE promises that one can join the OSCE, it does not carry much weight.

The difference between the two, incidentally, is where the strength of the EU is: to some extent in its exclusivity, selectivity... There are even other things: once you are a member of the European Union you are insured not only of support and solidarity but also you are assured that your laundry will not be washed in 'public'.

The OSCE has had the exact opposite of that approach: at the OSCE nothing is taboo. We spent a lot of time, usually on Thursdays, criticizing other member States; most of the time for a good reason. But whatever the reasoning, pointing at the deficiencies of others, be those relative or absolute, is not a taboo subject in the OSCE. As we said it

is not so within the European Union as a sign of solidarity and ‘family’ good will. Nor is it good manners for those in line to accession.

One particular item where we can go along both with partnership and competition is in the area of conflicts. I think that the EU has certain advantages and approaches of helping ‘frozen’ conflicts get somewhere and be resolved, while the OSCE has at least for now in many of them a first rank responsibility. Here is an area where we, both the OSCE and the EU, should not compete but complement and supplement each other’s work.

Few words about something of more specific concern to our Delegation: the European Neighborhood Policy on which we have a couple of comments. I think what the EU requests for good progressive neighbors consists of a list of reforms that of course we fully endorse. We have tried to respond to most of them. We have moved rather fast in 2005. We have similarly anticipated that in the next two-three months we will present our Action Plan and theoretically negotiations will begin sometime at the end of February or beginning of March.

In that sense we rely very much on the leadership of what the Austrian Presidency will do, and hope that we will move ahead. Of course, we are somewhat uncomfortable if every so often, the notion of parity injects itself into treating the South Caucasus as a single unit. We are much more committed to the idea that in a situation such as this, every potential neighbor be judged and evaluated on its own merit.

The notion of parity to us is not fully encouraging. Therefore we hope that the Austrian Presidency would somehow support a more discriminating, distinct approach to each individual case.

Some years ago, not so long ago, we told this audience, including the EU that some of us here were ‘not even on the horizon of the horizon’ of the Union. We can now at least know that because of the last two years Armenia and similar countries are at least on the horizon of the horizon. That for us is a very encouraging transformation.

Let me conclude by saying that our optimism about the Austrian Presidency of EU is that Austria because of its unique history right after the World War II was never fully drawn in ‘either, or’, one side or the other of the Cold War. Instead it served as a bridge between the two: while sharing values distinctly with one side, but never ever put into a position of choosing its partners and strategic commitments. We think that ‘bridge’ role may also be useful at this moment, in dealing with some of the internal issues of the European Union as well. In that case, we will be the great beneficiaries of that, all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.