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## **Preventing conflict and building peace: The CSCE and conflict prevention in Europe.**

**Address by Max van der Stoel, CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to the Meeting of the Third Committee of the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

**Vienna, 6 July 1994**

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[1. CSCE as a community of values]

Mr. Chairman,

Ever since the great and moving changes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe has been regarded as a community of values, and rightly so. The CSCE is the embodiment of what the states of the Euro-Atlantic region have defined as their common political-ethical philosophy and their common standards of behaviour. They have established these foundations not only among themselves but also in their relationship with their peoples.

Importantly, the CSCE's comprehensive concept of security relates peace, security and prosperity directly to the observance of human rights and democratic freedoms and the existence of a market economy. The participating States have repeatedly expressed their continuing commitment to use the CSCE to consolidate human rights, democracy, the rule of law and economic freedom as the foundation for peace, security and stability. In this way the CSCE and its participating States are engaged in building the peace for generations to come and thus in preventing conflicts in the future.

The recognition of the central place that human beings should have in the ambitions and policies of the participating States finds its reflection in the central place of the human dimension within the CSCE process. I would like to underline two principles which are fundamental to the concept of the CSCE human dimension and without which the human dimension would be deprived of its significance and thus the CSCE as a community of values robbed of its heart.

First, the commitments and responsibilities undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the CSCE apply in their entirety and equally in each and all of the participating States. The human dimension is indivisible; there can be no zones of lesser humanity. Second, human dimension commitments are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned. The argument of non-interference in internal affairs with regard to the human dimension is not valid; it never has been.

The economic dimension of the CSCE has gained substantially in importance, based on the principles of a free market economy. The participating States have recognised that free market

systems, environmentally sustainable economic growth and prosperity go hand-in-hand with individual freedom and political pluralism. Key issues of the transition process to democratic market economies are now a standard subject for discussion in the framework of the CSO meeting as the Economic Forum. The States have equally recognised that preservation of the environment is a shared interest and responsibility of all nations.

## [2. CSCE as a community of purpose]

Mr. Chairman,

In addition to and building upon the concept of the CSCE as a community of values, we should also look upon the Helsinki process as a community of purpose. There is a need for the CSCE to clearly define its role and mission in the evolving European security architecture, taking into account what international organisations like NATO, the Council of Europe and the European Union are already doing. It will give enhanced focus to the multidimensional activities in which the CSCE engages, it will give it a more easily recognisable place of its own in the system of interlocking institutions, and it will make our citizens better understand what the Helsinki process is all about. In view of the characteristics of the CSCE process and its limited resources and capabilities one should ask what it can realistically contribute to security and stability in Europe.

I would submit that the Helsinki process should concentrate on what it is best placed to do, and that is conflict prevention in the wide sense. By that I mean not only the immediate prevention of violent conflict, but also building long-term peace building. It involves building a viable democracy and its institutions, creating confidence between the government and the population, structuring the protection and promotion of human rights, the elimination of all forms of gender or racial discrimination and respect for minorities. It also requires the peaceful transition from a rigid state-commanded economic order to a flexible and humane market-oriented system which increases prosperity while paying due regard to social justice. In addition, building long-term peace involves continued international arms control and using and enhancing the regimes of military transparency. Overarching, the political discussion among the participating States are an essential means of monitoring the process and making adjustments where necessary.

In the past few years, we have already witnessed the increasing role the CSCE is playing in the prevention of conflict and the management of crises. In the recent past, it has been amply demonstrated that CSCE preventive diplomacy and its comprehensive approach are of essential value for peace and stability in Europe. This experience also shows that most conflict is not an unavoidable natural disaster but can indeed be prevented if the necessary efforts are made. From my vantage point I can say that the same holds true for ethnic conflict. Although the relationships involved often have a centuries-old history, such conflicts very often have more immediate political causes. Some politicians and other leaders try to use the psychological uncertainties and the material scarcities of the present time as an opportunity for increasing their hold on power. When we recognise such sources of tension, we can address them effectively.

The CSCE should also deal with conflict prevention through peace building in post-conflict situations. Even if violence has come to an end, very often the underlying causes which led to the conflict have not been removed. In situations in which the threshold between non-violence and violence had been crossed before, renewed sharp tensions and armed clashes are not

unlikely. Such 'post-conflict conflict prevention' will of course have to be fully integrated in and coordinated with a more general strategy of peace-building which is required in post-conflict societies. Strategies appropriate to pre-conflict peace building can also be applied in post-conflict situations, but social rehabilitation and economic structure will be much heavier and complex tasks than if the country and the people concerned had not been shattered by warfare.

### [3. CSCE as a community of responsibility]

Mr. Chairman,

If the CSCE is to succeed as a community of values and a community of purpose, it should also be regarded as a community of responsibility, both by its participating States and by the public at large. Undeniably, the leaders of individual states themselves are primarily responsible for implementing CSCE commitments. At the same time, the international community has its moral and political duty, too.

In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, entitled 'A Call for Sacrifice. The Co-Responsibility of the West', Czech President Václav Havel made some very relevant comments with regard to this. Referring to the responsibilities of the West, he wrote the following, and I quote: "I do not think at all that the main role of the democratic West is to solve all the problems of the 'postcommunist world.' Our countries ... must deal with their own immense problems themselves. The ... West, however, should not look on as though it were a mere visitor at a zoo or the audience at a horror movie, on edge to know how it will turn out. It should perceive these processes as the very least as something that intrinsically concerns it, and that somehow decides its own fate, that demands its own active involvement and challenges it to make sacrifices in the interests of a bearable future for us all." End of quote.

In my view, Mr. Chairman, these are words which ought not only to inspire our thinking but also, I would say, our actions. Of course the step from early warning to early action is always a difficult one but it has to be taken timely and effectively. The participating States must be prepared to give concrete political and material support which in some cases will require considerable investments. Such a test of its resolve and credibility will come sooner than later.

One should of course not underestimate the burden of such a task. However, such investments are well worth making as they will yield significant returns. In humanitarian, political and financial terms conflict prevention is highly preferable over rebuilding societies and reconstructing economies after a violent conflict, and over resorting to peacekeeping or, if it comes to that, military intervention.

Concertation and coordination of efforts is needed to maximise the effectiveness of our involvement in a concrete situation, the more so in view of the number and variety of CSCE activities. Ideally, coordination should be such that a duplication of efforts and concomitant waste of resources is avoided. Clashes of competencies, inadequate flows of information and openly diverging assessments of situations may in fact render these efforts less effective and send the wrong message to the state concerned. Concurrent activities should reinforce each other and not work at cross-purposes or be played off against each other.

Mr. Chairman,

It is cooperation which lies at the heart of the exercise of our common responsibility, or as it is

sometimes called the cooperative implementation of CSCE commitments. The so-called Programme of Coordinated Support to Recently Admitted Participating States provides a useful framework for such cooperative implementation. As CSCE High Commissioner, I too would emphasise the cooperative and non-coercive nature of my involvement. Durable solutions are only possible if there is a sufficient measure of consent from the parties directly involved.

It is in light of this crucial aspect of cooperation that we should look upon the process of increasing CSCE intrusiveness in the affairs of participating States. This is particularly evident in the human dimension, although of undiminished importance is of course also the regime of military confidence- and security-building measures. Starting with the discussions on implementation, through the adoption and application of the Vienna and Moscow Mechanisms, to the establishment of on-the-spot missions to participating States, the possibilities of the CSCE community to address human dimension issues in participating States have increased. So has the cooperative component of the tools which are at the disposal of the CSCE to monitor and improve implementation of human dimension commitments.

#### [4. Role of parliamentarians]

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to the foregoing, the role of parliamentarians both in their national parliaments and as members of the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly is of crucial importance. As crucial decision-takers in a democracy and in the wider body politic in the CSCE States, they can monitor whether States live up to their commitments and can buttress the resolve of States to exercise their international responsibilities of solidarity. Connected to this, parliamentarians also have a special role to play in fostering understanding and support for the CSCE and its activities both within the national parliaments. As the CSCE's comprehensive approach to security fundamentally incorporates the promotion of pluralist democracy, the involvement of the Assembly as the symbol par excellence of this pluralism should not be underestimated.

#### [5. Short-term conflict prevention]

Mr. Chairman,

Investing in the durable prevention of conflict in Europe requires a long-term perspective. However, these long-term aspects cannot be separated from short-term conflict prevention. Efforts at laying the groundwork for a real democracy are vain if in the meantime tensions escalate into bloody civil war or international conflict. Short-term conflict prevention aims at the prevention or containment of an immediate development towards escalation. This preventive action may also involve heading off or immediately correcting flagrant violations of human rights commitments, violations which may cause an escalation of tensions.

An essential precondition for a timely and effective response would seem to be that the participating states have an open eye for longer-term developments with a view to anticipating future crises, and not just paying attention to already existing crises. Of course alarmism and precipitous actions have to be avoided. But it is never too early for a realistic assessment of worrisome developments.

\* Human dimension

Human dimension concerns are often a critical component of conflict prevention. Violations of human dimension commitments lead to tensions, to societal conflicts and distrust. At times, they may have cross-border consequences, such as involuntary migration. Especially if large groups such as minorities are affected, the stability of states or even a region may be at risk. In the particular case of minorities, there may be kin-states which feel they should act as defenders of the minority living on the other side of the border, in doing so sometimes increasing bilateral frictions.

Experience shows that it is authoritarian states, not democracies, which are often prone to aggressive policies. Conversely, states which fully respect the CSCE commitments to democracy and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, are thus contributing to peace and stability. Their political systems provide guarantees against intra-state conflicts, and they are more likely to look for peaceful, constructive relations with neighbouring states. A democratic framework as described in the CSCE documents provides the vital basis for the prevention of human dimension violations or, when they occur, for their redress. One cannot overestimate the importance of effective democratic institutions in this regard. They are essential to guaranteeing and organising the participation in public life of all and to channeling and resolving the conflicts of interest which are normal to all societies.

The High Commissioner, too, has to include human dimension considerations in his assessments and recommendations. He has not been defined as an instrument of the human dimension, nor as a spokesperson or ombudsman for minorities or persons belonging to them. Nevertheless, I would note that all situations with which I have had to deal naturally contain many human dimension aspects. The protection of persons belonging to national minorities starts with the respect of general human rights. These rights are applicable to all people including persons belonging to national minorities. In addition, other measures are needed as well. In my recommendations I have thus far concentrated especially on the need for a continual dialogue between the government and minorities and on the establishment of institutions to guarantee such a structural dialogue.

I should stress that there is not one human dimension recipe for minority issues. There are many different situations where minorities are concerned and each case has to be assessed in light of its particular aspects and circumstances. At the same time, preventing ethnic conflict requires that the net be thrown wider than the human dimension. Minority questions are so intimately connected to issues which go to the heart of the existence of states that an approach based exclusively on the human rights aspects would be incomplete and therefore insufficient.

#### \* Economic factors

The CSCE's comprehensive concept of security also includes economic factors. At present quite a number of CSCE states are engaged in a process of transforming their economic order from command economies to free-market economies. This involves issues such as the introduction of markets, the interplay of demand, supply and other price-making forces, the introduction of the private sector and a redefinition of the role of the state. The CSO at its annual meeting as the Economic Forum concentrates on questions concerning the transition to and development of free-market economies as an essential contribution to the building of democracy, and the establishment and strengthening of democracy contribute to maintaining peace and security.

However, there are issues falling within the scope of the Second Basket and relevant to security for which an approach exclusively oriented towards the transition to a free market economy would seem insufficient. Thus, it would seem to me that the economic and environmental dimension has not been integrated into CSCE conflict prevention as completely as it could be. For example, the conversion of military industries to competitive civilian ones in states whose economies depend on them, the modernisation of an economic sector in which a large proportion of a national minority is employed, the use of scarce transboundary water sources, the care and repair of obsolete and often dangerous nuclear facilities - these are but a few examples of Basket-II projects which can have a security priority.

The CSCE could try to identify security priority projects in the field of the Second Basket and submit such projects to those international economic organisations which have the means to address them concretely, engaging them in a substantial discussion on these issues. The mandate of the CSO meeting as the Economic Forum could be expanded to incorporate the abovementioned issues, thus reflecting the CSO's primary responsibility concerning conflict prevention.

For several reasons economic factors are thus important to conflict prevention, certainly to conflict prevention in relation to many minority questions. In some countries economic developments have taken such a downward turn that production is fastly decreasing, more and more shortages are occurring and the population at large is becoming more and more impoverished. This makes it more likely that social tensions arise and people may become more open to authoritarian and even xenophobic influences. Some people will be looking for a scapegoat, a minority being a likely candidate for that role. At the same time bad economic conditions are one of the factors causing migration flows, which in themselves lead to tensions which could in turn lead to conflict.

One cannot say that it is economic factors in themselves which have caused the tensions in the CSCE states in which I am involved. These factors do, however, make up an important element of the context in which minority tensions arise and evolve, often exacerbating matters. Therefore, I have sometimes felt the need to highlight economic factors as part of the essential background to ethnic tensions, with a view to sensitising the CSCE community to their existence. In the economic field, international assistance can help diminish the enormous time pressure under which reformers have to operate by stimulating external stabilisation and integration in the world economy. It can be instrumental in softening the social pain which transformation processes unavoidably entail and thus help avoid rising social tensions. Effectively addressing tension-generating issues often requires investments which economically weak states have difficulty in making.

From my particular perspective I would add that effectively addressing minority issues often requires investments in certain projects, such as language education. With relatively modest amounts of money important conflict prevention results can be achieved, whereas if a conflict erupts the cost of helping countries afterwards would be much greater.

[Conclusion]

Mr. Chairman,

Building the peace and preventing conflict are essential to the future of our continent. I do not

think that Europe can afford more of the bloody conflicts that devastate some of her regions. If we do not invest enough now and work in advance, we will be presented with a much larger bill in the near future. In the final analysis, it is the CSCE community as a whole which determines the success of all CSCE efforts at building peace and preventing conflict. If the States continue to provide the CSCE, its organs and officials with their political and operational support, if they are prepared to look ahead and give attention to what is in the future as well as to what is happening now, and if they are willing to tackle the challenges that confront Europe - then we will be much better placed to prevent more conflicts from breaking out. The support and encouragement which the national parliaments and the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly can provide are essential to the fulfilment of these tasks.

Thank you.

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