

A D D R E S S

**by Dr Dimitrij Rupel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia
at the 12th OSCE Ministerial Meeting in Sofia,
7th December 2004**

Mr Chairman,

Several decades ago Slovenian writer France Bevk decided that he had to get to know the Bulgarian nation. He thus embarked on a trip and brought back his impressions of your people, culture and history to the Slovenian public in the book "Ten Days in Bulgaria". In the book, he noted with excitement that he and his Bulgarian friends could speak their own languages and still understand each other. The book was published in 1938. What followed afterwards was a long period during which contact between our two peoples, despite the numerous cultural and linguistic links that bind us, was limited. This was due to specific historical circumstances, of which we are all aware. In the end it was the Helsinki Process that began bringing down the walls that kept us apart.

I therefore find special symbolism in taking over from you the role of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office. I believe this handover speaks volumes not only of the changes that have taken place since 1975, but also of the special mission and purpose of this organization. I am honoured to continue where you are leaving off. I would like to thank you and your staff for all the energy you put into your Chairmanship and for your efforts to reinvigorate the organization.

As a result of your dedicated work, this 12th Ministerial Council in Sofia leaves us with a number of important tasks. I attach special importance to the continuation of your efforts in reforming the OSCE, with a view to increasing its effectiveness and relevance. Other international organizations are constantly reforming and there is no reason why the OSCE should not do the same. I am therefore pleased that the decision on the Role of the Secretary General will strengthen his position as the Chief Administrative Officer of the OSCE. If there is no decision reached until end of this year, Slovenia as new Chairman-in-Office will start the process of appointing Secretary General of the OSCE from the beginning. I also welcome the establishment of the Panel of Eminent Personalities, which should provide new impetus to the much-needed assessment of our activities and the discussion on how our performance might be improved in light of the challenges that await us in the future.

Foremost among these challenges, in my view, is the current situation in the organization, which is characterized by a looming fissure in relations East and West of Vienna. Our inability to adopt a Political Declaration here in Sofia serves as a stark reflection of this regrettable reality. Sometimes it seems that the more we talk of no new dividing lines in Europe, the more we are confronted with them. I therefore read carefully the recent Moscow Declaration and the Astana Address. Let me underline the importance, which I attach to the Declaration of the nine Presidents of the CIS states. The Declaration would warrant serious consideration if only one Head of State signed it. As it is, it represents a resounding expression of dissatisfaction at the highest level, which has to be taken into account when looking at the work of the organization. I intend to work relentlessly to address this situation. After all, I firmly believe that there is so much more that unites us than divides us, in particular the foundations upon which our organization was built.

Our cooperation is all the more important in light of the important issues that require our serious attention. I refer, of course, to the current situation concerning the adoption of the new scales of contribution and, subsequently, the adoption of the 2005 budget before the end of this year. Without this, the very functioning of the organization would be in serious jeopardy. I therefore call on all the participating States to demonstrate their commitment to the OSCE through necessary flexibility in the on-going discussions. In this connection, I would like to remind you that next year will be the year of anniversaries; namely, the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the 15th anniversary of the Paris Charter, and the 10th anniversary of the OSCE, as well as the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the 10th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords. Such events always serve as an opportunity both to look back and to try and chart the way forward. It would therefore not be becoming of us to begin this upcoming anniversary year without a budget. The organization is cost-effective, after all, and holds great promise and great potential. Sometimes this is clearer to those outside the OSCE than to us ourselves. I would therefore like to extend a special welcome here to Mongolia as a new Partner for Co-operation and express our readiness to assist it in establishing close relations with the organization.

As you can see, the agenda before us is a demanding one. Needless to say, it will be faithfully reflected in the program of the Slovenian Chairmanship, which I intend to present at the Permanent Council in Vienna this coming January 13. I can already tell you that in my work I will be guided by the following principles: focus on implementation; ensuring the continuity

of the work of the organization; fostering adequate attention to all three dimensions; maintaining flexibility in addressing challenges as they arise; enhancing the geographic balance of OSCE activities through promotion of issues that are relevant to the entire OSCE area and through strengthening the cooperation with other international organizations, partner states and NGOs. I therefore count on your support in eliminating the divides among us. I also count on the able assistance of the OSCE Secretariat and the OSCE Institutions in the execution of all of these demanding tasks.

Slovenia approaches the great responsibilities that await us next year with the invaluable experience and knowledge acquired this year as a member of the Troika of the OSCE. I would therefore like to thank wholeheartedly our Dutch colleagues not only for the important contributions they made to the work of the organization during their previous Chairmanship, but also for all the advice and assistance they graciously shared with us during this period of our "apprenticeship". You will be missed.

I would also like to express our appreciation to our Belgian colleagues for the fruitful cooperation to date, which presents an excellent basis for the challenging work that awaits us next year. Together we are stronger.

In conclusion, I would like to say that my biggest concern at this moment is averting a potential stalemate in the organization, by encouraging the reengagement of all the participating States within the OSCE. In my view, this will be crucial – not only for the adoption of the organization's budget, but also – for the organization's future as such. Our renewed partnership would also have concrete consequences for the work of the OSCE in a number of areas, including the so-called "frozen conflicts". I would therefore like to conclude my remarks with the hope that next year we will celebrate the Thirtieth Anniversary of working for security and cooperation in Europe not only in words but in deeds as well.

Thank you.