

Statement by Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Petrovsky
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
50th Anniversary of the Council of Europe
Budapest, 6 May 1999

In my capacity as Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, I wish to add a few words about the special significance of today's ceremony, as seen from the oldest and largest European headquarters of the United Nations.

The Council of Europe has had a bond with the United Nations for nearly half a century. The exchange of letters on 15 December 1951 between the first Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Trygve Lie, and his counterpart in the Council of Europe, Mr. J.C. Paris, established that the two Secretariats would work together in the following areas: exchange of information, mutual consultation, attendance of their representatives as observers at each other's meetings, and technical cooperation. Indeed, Article 1 of the Council's Statute -- "to achieve a greater unity between its Members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress" -- is every bit as compatible with the United Nations Charter and with United Nations peacebuilding efforts on the eve of the 21st century, as it was when both organizations were still quite new, and their respective memberships a fraction of what they are today.

In the decades since, and most notably after the end of the Cold War, cooperation between the Council of Europe and the United Nations, including its Geneva-based bodies, has deepened and broadened. I take particular pride in the fact that an informal process of consultations launched in July 1993 between the

Council of Europe, the United Nations Office at Geneva, and the (then) Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe to share information on our respective activities in conflict areas (~~in the countries in transition~~), has become an established practice, with at least one annual high-level "tripartite" meeting, and regular bilateral contacts at the top and working levels of our organizations. The scope of these tripartite discussions has in recent years moved beyond primarily humanitarian concerns to include human rights, economic rehabilitation and development – all crucial if peace, democracy and the rule of law are to thrive. The latest high-level tripartite meeting was convened in February in Strasbourg under the Chairmanship of Council of Europe Secretary-General, Mr. Daniel Tarschys. The Council of Europe has also, during the past year, hosted two very timely "target-oriented" tripartite meetings – one on Albania and the other on reform of the judiciary in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia. With the Council's special expertise in promoting respect for human rights and democratic institution-building, you have a leading role to play in such discussions, and we look forward to your insights at the next "target-oriented" meeting in Geneva, which will address law enforcement and police training.

A highlight in the deepening ties between our two Organizations took place last July when Secretary-General Tarschys participated in a meeting at United Nations headquarters in New York convened by Secretary-General Annan with the Heads of Regional Organizations. The overarching theme of the meeting was conflict prevention. While the Council of Europe's Statute specifies that "matters relating to National Defence do not fall within its scope", its role in support of democracy and rule of law place it firmly within the scope of United Nations and regional peace-building activities. It is worth noting that both at the July meeting and a follow-up working-level meeting held in December, the UN-CofE-OSCE process of tripartite consultations was cited as a valuable mechanism which might be of value in other regions of the world. The need for continuous

consultations between the United Nations and European regional structures has become all the more evident in light of the ^{recent} escalation of the crisis in ^{Kosovo} Yugoslavia, and we are at least fortunate in having laid the groundwork over the past six years, in deepening getting to know each other at all levels of our organizations, and deepening our familiarization with each other's "institutional cultures" -- both at the diverse headquarters and in the field.)

Europeans across the continent look to the Council of Europe, with its 50 years of accumulated wisdom and experience, to be a standard bearer for safeguarding the ideals and principles set out in your Statute and Conventions. As was so solemnly reaffirmed in the Final Declaration issued on the occasion of your Second Summit in October 1997: your attachment to the "fundamental principles of the Council of Europe -- pluralist democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law" -- and the commitment of your governments "to comply fully with the requirements and meet the responsibilities arising from membership in your Organization" sends a strong message to those parts of Europe where these principles, are challenged or are in jeopardy, and a message of hope to all those who strive for them.

On behalf of the United Nations family in Geneva, I join my voice to that of Secretary-General Kofi Annan in paying tribute to the first fifty years of the Council of Europe. We look forward to working even more closely with you in the century ahead.

In conclusion, with words of thanks to special part of Hungary, which created such a marvelous ~~unpleasant~~ environment for this ~~celebration~~ important event which ~~not only for Europe~~ but internal ~~and~~ comm