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**Speech by The Rt Hon Terry Davis
Secretary General of the Council of Europe
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If there is one thing I have learned in many years of giving talks and making speeches, it is that brevity is the mother of attention. So when I tell you that I will be brief, I mean it.

Several of the speakers before me have referred to the events which took place in the Caucasus last August, namely the conflict between two member states of both the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

For my part, I draw one conclusion and two lessons from what happened. While the jury is still out on how to apportion the blame for the outburst of hostilities, it is clear that both countries broke the specific commitments they made at the time of joining Council of Europe, specifically to settle conflicts by peaceful means.

As for lessons, the crisis has shown that we need to reinforce conflict prevention in Europe. The United Nations and the OSCE have been working very hard to contain the so-called frozen conflicts in Georgia and in other parts of Europe, but it is clear that efforts to contain conflicts need to be supported by measures which target the roots of the conflicts and create the basis for long-term internal and regional stability. The fire-fighters are working hard and they deserve much credit, but without proper attention to fire prevention, they are fighting an uphill battle.

The second lesson is that in situations like these, soul searching and a critical assessment of what we have done and what we have failed to do is normal, but we should not simply give knee-jerk reactions. In the aftermath of a war, we need to take a critical look at international mechanisms, but perhaps before creating new ones, we should see how we can better use existing ones.

The Council of Europe is already involved and will continue to be involved in the international action to respond to the immediate aftermath of the war, in accordance with the decisions of our member states and in close co-operation with our partners, especially the OSCE. In addition, we will continue with our programmes of co-operation, assistance and monitoring aimed at reinforcing compliance with Council of Europe standards and principles, in the countries in the region and throughout Europe.

These activities are related to the Council of Europe core values which are democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The Council of Europe is a Europe-wide framework in which the member states are locked into a system of legally binding standards. Against the background of recent events, it is clear that we need to be more vigilant, consistent and insistent when it comes to failures to abide by these standards.

Finally, we should not neglect activities in areas such as culture and intercultural dialogue, social cohesion, youth and sport. These activities have a very important role in relations within and between our member states. They are an essential dimension of European co-operation, and they provide every member state with the opportunity to participate and contribute to the achievement of our common objectives. They bring everyone on board, and this is indispensable if we want to overcome differences and divisions and make real progress in respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe.