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**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY JEAN ASSELBORN,
VICE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND IMMIGRATION OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG
AT THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Madrid, 29 and 30 November 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As others have already pointed out, in a few days time several important events will be taking place that are likely to affect the security situation on the European continent. We must therefore redouble our efforts and work together to consolidate the role that our Organization plays and ensure that it is in a position to meet these new challenges.

Kosovo

In less than two weeks, the Contact Group Troika will submit its report on the direct negotiations it has conducted with the parties on the future status of Kosovo. I shall not dwell on speculations as to what might happen after 10 December — we spoke about it at length during the lunch yesterday. I agree with Mr. Bernard Kouchner's suggestion that we take account in the decision-making process of the date of the presidential election in Serbia in mid-January 2008. I should nevertheless like to stress that I, too, refuse to believe that the OSCE, the only security organization to bring together all of the countries on the European continent, will not have an important role to play in the future of Kosovo. I am thinking in particular of the mission in Kosovo, the largest within the OSCE with more than 1,000 members, which is critical to stability and peace in Kosovo and which makes a very valuable contribution to all concerned. It is for this reason that I join in the call for a commitment to be made here in Madrid for the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK) to continue its work and for its mandate to be extended beyond the end of the year, regardless of the outcome of the Kosovo status negotiations.

Conventional armed forces in Europe (CFE)

We have also been called upon to consider the decision by the Russian Federation to suspend implementation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) from 12 December. By ensuring a balance in conventional forces, the regime instituted by this Treaty has improved the security situation not just of the participating States but of all the States on the European continent. It is therefore our duty to uphold it. For that reason, we hope that the negotiators will be able to demonstrate sufficient creativity and flexibility to find solutions to the concerns raised during the Extraordinary Conference in

June, which Luxembourg had the honour to chair. These solutions must naturally take account of the security needs of all States Parties to the Treaty. Until we can reach accord on these solutions, we should reiterate here in Madrid the validity of the CFE regime and agree to do everything to create a basis acceptable to all States Parties for ratification of the Agreement on Adaptation.

Frozen conflicts

I appeal to the general sense of responsibility and the political will necessary to break the continuing deadlock in the conflicts in South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria. The continuance of these conflicts is detrimental to the credibility of our Organization. Regretfully, although there has been a certain amount of activity since the last Ministerial Council meeting in Brussels, there have been no advances or real progress towards a solution. There has even been a serious heightening of tensions in South Ossetia since the missile incident in the summer, which showed that the OSCE's reaction capability could be improved, despite the fact that our Organization already has a whole range of instruments to deal with crises of this type. We need to review the existing procedures and mechanisms and to continue discussion on the subject on the basis, in particular, of the food-for-thought paper by the Chairman-in-Office.

Convention on legal personality

Last year I regretted the fact that the OSCE's lack of a legal personality hampered its relations with other actors and caused undeniable inconveniences. We have before us a draft convention on international legal personality which enjoys unanimous support thanks to the notable efforts of the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, who chaired the working group and whom I should like to congratulate here. It would really be a shame if we did not succeed in taking this opportunity to steer this convention home and to adopt it now.

Future chairmanships

I welcome the fact that we have been able to reach agreement regarding the chairmanship of our Organization for the years 2009, 2010 and 2011. This agreement will enable the OSCE to look to the future with greater clarity and to plan its long-term activities more effectively. I should like to take this opportunity of congratulating Greece, Kazakhstan and Lithuania on their willingness to take on these important responsibilities.

Afghanistan

I also welcome the decision to extend the scope of our Organization by strengthening the co-operation with Afghanistan, one of our partner countries. The support of the OSCE should provide an appropriate response to the new threats to security such as the alarming extent of the drug trafficking along Afghanistan's borders with three of our participating States. This new initiative should benefit fully from the expertise and experience of the OSCE in particular regarding policing and the strengthening of border security.

Reactivating dialogue in the politico-military dimension

I should like to express our gratitude to the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) for its untiring contribution to strengthening the first dimension of our Organization. Security dialogue and the implementation of existing confidence-building measures have been revived during the past year. The efforts made with regard to combating small arms and light weapons, the elimination of stockpiles of conventional ammunition and the implementation of the United Nations resolutions on combating terrorism need to be kept up. We also support the FSC initiative to improve implementation of the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.

OSCE environmental security strategy

More than ever today, environmental issues feature high on the agenda of the international community. It is therefore fitting that the Spanish Chairmanship should have taken the initiative to make a statement on environmental security with a view to mobilizing and co-ordinating the OSCE's capacities so as to meet the new security challenges connected with the environment. This initiative also has the merit of helping to strengthen the economic and environmental dimension of our Organization.

Human dimension/maintaining the autonomy of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the contribution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

This year we have seen attempts to question the credibility of our Organization and some of its most valuable assets: the autonomy of the ODIHR for monitoring elections and the frank and open dialogue with civil society. The ODIHR's autonomy is the proof of its credibility, and by questioning it we backtrack on the progress that we have achieved together through commitments that are at the core of the Organization's objectives. We shall firmly oppose any effort to question these commitments. Throughout the year the ODIHR has reported on the measures it has taken to implement the recommendations of Decision No. 19/06 adopted in Brussels and it has thus carried out its obligations to the full.

The autonomy and credibility of the ODIHR in the field must thus be maintained, and I urge all participating States to respect the letter and spirit of its election monitoring commitments, which all of us without exception have subscribed to. I deeply regret that it is not possible for the ODIHR to monitor the parliamentary elections that will be taking place in Russia in the next few days.

As for dialogue by the OSCE with civil society represented by NGOs, this should reflect the freedom of expression that is at the basis of our democratic societies. This dialogue should not therefore be hampered by arbitrary criteria for the selection of NGOs authorized to speak in the various OSCE forums where they are likely to make significant contributions.

Lastly, I deeply regret that it has once again been impossible this year to adopt a decision on human rights defenders, who sometimes risk their lives to speak up in favour of universal values.

Mr. Chairman,

I should like to conclude by addressing my best wishes to the future Finnish Chairmanship and assuring it of our full support in the important and serious task that it will be undertaking next year.

Finally, I should like to congratulate the Spanish Chairmanship and you, Mr. Chairman, for the excellent work that you have performed this year and to thank you for the generous hospitality you have shown us here in Madrid.