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**Speech by Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht, incoming  
Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE  
Vienna, January 12, 2006**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with enthusiasm and at the same time with a bit of nervousness that I take the floor, here, today, as incoming Chairman-in-office. Enthusiasm because important and exciting tasks await us; nervousness because I realize how big the challenge is going to be.

In taking up the chair of our organization, my thanks go to the outgoing chair, Slovenia, and to my colleague Demitrij Rupel, and those around him. You have accomplished a truly remarkable task in lifting the cloud of doom which shrouded OSCE a year ago. One major achievement was to put our organization back on the financial and budgetary track again. This success clears for the Belgian Chair a way that, otherwise, could have been, much more bumpy. We are grateful for that.

I also believe, Ljubljana was a moment of renewed dialogue and better understanding. It demonstrated again a greater sense of inclusiveness, on which consensus is predicated. These are the hallmarks of OSCE, perhaps more than of any other organization.

After a challenging year 2005, I think that there is now a greater recognition of what OSCE and its unique cross-dimensional mandate can do for peace and stability in Europe. And the OSCE looks in a better shape now than it was at the beginning of the year 2005.

Our organization has been instrumental in bridging the great European divide of the cold war. We have built since then a body of commitments, norms and principles, which now bind us together. This is in fact the essence of modern collective security in the broadest sense. I would like to reiterate our profound attachment to these common principles and to the institutions of OSCE.

It is with optimism that Belgium assumes her new responsibilities as Chairman in Office. Ljubljana set out a road map for institutional improvement, which we intend to actively pursue in order to implement successfully, and in a timely manner, the mandate given to us by the Ministerial Council. In this context, I will appoint a high level representative of the chair to work closely with the OSCE institutions, including ODIHR, as well as with capitals.

The objective is not reform for the sake of it but to adapt our organization and its functioning to the new European environment. Commitments are, and stay what they are, but implementation should, and could be improved according to the mandate given to us by the Ministers.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me remind that security is not given once and for all. It is a matter of constant attention, continued investment and common responsibility. The changes which took place since the creation of the OSCE have been dramatic and, on the whole, positive. The risk of a continental conflict has disappeared. But security and stability in the whole of Europe remain a key concern for the OSCE. There will be no effective and lasting democratic rule without stability. Conversely, peace and security are also predicated upon respect for democracy, civil liberties and human rights. There will also be no lasting stability without economic development.

That is why we should attach great importance to each and every of the three dimensions of our comprehensive approach of security. That is also why we will care to more evenly balance the activities undertaken in the three different dimensions, in particular by giving more substance to the economic and environmental dimension.

Security rests also on shared prosperity. For years after 1975, the Economic and Environmental Dimension of our organization was running idle because of the incompatibility of opposing economic systems. In today's globalized world, our economies have started to open up and to interconnect, creating more wealth through new opportunities for free trade.

As you know, the work on the Economic Forum 2006 is already well under way. The theme of transportation has generated a lot of interest. Economic cooperation, and for that matter, cooperation as such presupposes a viable, secure and effective, cross regional transportation network which is today close to inexistence. "Open a road and trade will hatch", they say. Let me be clear, however: the OSCE is not there to construct bridges or roads. This is not its task and this is not the aim. But the OSCE is an important forum where, all participating countries meet, discuss problems and look for common ground to find solutions. Better economic cooperation can lead to more regional stability. We would like to suggest that the OSCE becomes the driving force for overcoming persistent obstacles.

In this context the widely publicized issue of gas prices between two participating states over the last weeks, deserves to be mentioned. We would like to explore how we could follow up on the issue raised at this occasion. The Strategy for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, adopted in 2003, remains in my view a precious tool. You will find us eager to work with you.

In February, we will hold a high level "Military doctrine Seminar". Five years almost after the 2001 edition, the participating states will have a possibility to exchange views on each other's perceived military defense needs, thinking and technologies. This exercise is, I think, most timely, and will contribute to the development of a renewed cooperative spirit in the field of military security.

Threats do evolve. In taking new forms, they add not only to the overall feeling of insecurity but also tend to make the future less predictable. I think in particular of terrorism, now one of the gravest threats not only to security in a physical sense but also to the integrity of democratic institutions. Ljubljana recognized that by giving us a judicious mandate to enhance legal cooperation. We will carry it out.

The preservation of the conventional arms control regime in Europe and, when possible, its improvement are also, if only indirectly, part of OSCE field of action. The third CFE Review Conference is scheduled in May. I express the wish the long overdue ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty would become possible at last. Progress has been made toward achieving the conditions for such an outcome, but some further efforts are required, if we don't want to see one of the main pillars of the arms control regime fall into oblivion.

Among the substantive decisions taken in Ljubljana, I would like to highlight those relating to the rule of law and specifically the fight against organized crime. This is an issue that concerns all OSCE-countries, East and West. It is also a theme which directly preoccupies our citizens. Organized crime eats away societies like gangrene affects bodies. It pushes, everywhere, non-suspecting citizens to a precarious existence and deprives them of the legitimate benefit of their labor. That's why we should fight it with great determination

The fight against organized crime is not new to the OSCE which already has action programs on combating human trafficking, illegal drugs and weapon trading, money laundering and corruption. The OSCE has also started up programs to strengthen the rule of law, and provide assistance for police and judiciary training. During our presidency we want to bring more coherence between the numerous OSCE-activities in the field, try to give more substance and backbone to these activities and introduce new ideas.

Cooperation should be intensified, with the support of organizations such as UNODC. Threat assessment techniques could be shared. We might even want to invest more financial, human and professional resources.

At the starting point, I would like to stress that the fight against organized crime requires the establishment of effective judicial systems firmly upholding the rule of law. The OSCE has an opportunity to think afresh, to streamline, even to expand its efforts. We think it would be a good idea to devote the annual 3-day Human Dimension Seminar of 2006 to the building of comprehensive Criminal Justice Systems.

In upholding the human rights and the rule of law in criminal justice systems, emphasis should be put on the prevention of arbitrary arrest and detention and on the right to fair trial.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the end, it is the peoples that make a country secure, prosperous and stable. Hence, early emphasis was laid by our organization on the protection of the fundamental rights of the human being. When citizens are respected in their personal dignity, they are also more likely to contribute dynamism, creativity and resources to the development of the society as a whole.

The OSCE has a strong record and competent institutions to follow up on the commitments in the human dimension. The protection of minorities, the preservation of the freedom of the media, the efforts at democratization, the observation of elections and the denunciation of torture will, do not doubt, continue with vigor. There ought to be no double standards. The norms apply to all equally. Everybody has the same commitments.

The OSCE's efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination have reached a new stage. We will do our utmost to see through the implementation-focused events that the Ministerial decision has requested us to organize. In this respect, I would like to express particular thanks to Kazakhstan and Croatia for the offers they have made to host them. I would also like to inform you of my intention to renew the mandate of the three Personal Representatives on tolerance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2006 will be, I hope, a year of new opportunities to find a solution to some of the so-called "frozen conflicts". The ministerial in Ljubljana noted that "time for decision had come" in Nagorno-Karabach. I will, as CIO, visit the region later this month.

The chair will, in any case, stand ready to contribute to the best of its ability to a successful outcome. In the same spirit, positive developments have taken place on the question of South-Ossetia. We do encourage all the actors to take their responsibility in a constructive spirit. Let us also hope, that those developments will set an example for progress in other regions, namely in Transdniestria, where, after some hopeful developments, and notably the resumption of the negotiation under a new format renewed efforts are urgently called for.

In Central Asia, the OSCE plays, according to me, especially through its field missions, an important role in sustaining dialogue and providing assistance in a long haul process which calls for consistency and patience on the part of all concerned.

2006 will be a critical year for Kosovo. Negotiations on the future status have started. OSCE, with its massive presence on the ground is bound to play a major role when Unmik winds down its mission. The OSCE should be actively involved in this process and I will, to this effect, remain in close touch with President Athisari and his team as well as with other leading organizations. I will visit the region in February.

Conflict resolution is indeed a core task of the OSCE. And I plan to devote much of my time and energy to this task. Naturally, the ultimate responsibility for finding the solution resides with the parties themselves.

Recent events have demonstrated the sensitive nature of elections, and elections monitoring in particular. This is not, in itself, a cause of surprise but nor should it be a reason to put into question the legitimacy nor the usefulness of institutions, such as ODIHR. These institutions are designed primarily to reinforce and not to undermine, as is sometimes argued, the credibility of the democratic process wherever it takes place. As CIO, I am of the opinion that it is the duty of participating states to make full use, in a timely manner, of existing instruments designed to assure transparency and accountability. We call on Belarus to invite ODIHR to observe the upcoming presidential elections.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I conclude this statement, I would like to refer with appreciation to the participating States and the main shareholders of our remarkable organization, those many actors who contribute to the day-to-day advancement and success of the OSCE. To the Asian and Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation, I want to reiterate our desire to pursue an active relationship. To Secretary General Perrin de Brichambaut and his able staff, I want to express my trust and my desire for a very close cooperation. To the Heads of the OSCE Institutions and Field Mission's, unique features for which our organization is recognized, I want to say how conscious I am of our dependency on your daily efforts. To the Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly, I want to voice my hope for a fruitful political dialogue.

To all I say, let us seize the opportunities that lay before us. We have a responsibility to take up and a task to perform. Let's do it together

I thank you very much.