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**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC
H.E. MR. KAROLOS PAPOULIAS
TO THE OPENING SESSION OF THE
17TH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE OSCE**

Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Mr. Secretary General,
Directors of the OSCE Institutions,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Greece, to the 17th Ministerial Council of the OSCE. Today's meeting is an important political event which gives us the opportunity to reinforce peaceful cooperation among the 56 OSCE participating States and promote our shared goals. It gives us an opportunity to achieve tangible and substantial results.

Just a few weeks ago, we celebrated together the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today Europe enjoys a period of unprecedented security and stability. The OSCE is a pan-European security Organization which comprises 56 states from Europe, North America and Central Asia. Political dialogue covers all aspects of security. The politico-military dimension. Cooperation in economic and environmental issues. And, of course, the human dimension. Democratic freedoms and human rights.

As we look back on almost thirty-five years since the Helsinki Final Act, we may stand proud of the accomplishments that have been achieved.

These accomplishments are clear, and significant. We evoke the principles and decisions of the OSCE to defend international legitimacy, peaceful coexistence and democratic freedoms, as well as human rights.

Still, developments do not justify complacency or quiescence. Greece seeks and promotes good neighbourly relations and the principle of peaceful coexistence, not merely with its neighbours, but in the wider European space. We support, and are actively engaged in all efforts in this direction.

As the Greek Chairmanship, we inaugurated, in this spirit, the Corfu Process, whose goal is for the Organization to respond effectively to the security challenges in the 21st Century.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite the progress that has been achieved, our work remains unfinished. Dividing lines continue to exist, old conflicts have yet to be resolved, new challenges emerge both inside and outside our borders. Here, in Athens, the birthplace of democracy, we have an obligation to proceed with decisiveness in order to restore trust and to enhance cooperation between all member-states of the Organization. In the OSCE, we are in a position to proceed with a wide-ranging, strategic dialogue on forging joint response to the common challenges in European Security.

To this end, the Athens Ministerial provides us all with an important opportunity to send out clear message of unity on the need for an enhanced dialogue complemented by joint action. This would be a clear message on the future of the OSCE and would enhance political dialogue on European security.

With these words, I declare open the 17th Ministerial Council and wish you every success in your deliberations.