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**STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE
OPENING SESSION OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS,
H.E. BERNARD KOUCHNER**

Helsinki, 4 and 5 December 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary General,
Mr. President of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Distinguished Ministers,
Dear Colleagues,

It is a pleasure for me to address the Sixteenth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council on behalf of the European Union (EU). First of all, I should like to congratulate Alexander Stubb on his outstanding chairmanship and thank him for welcoming us so warmly here in Helsinki.

The OSCE is the only institution in which all the countries of Europe and Central Asia as well as the United States of America and Canada can engage in dialogue together on the questions of security that are of concern to them. It is a unique model of co-operation based on the belief that the security of our continent goes hand and hand with the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This model and this freely agreed co-operation are, as we are all aware, more necessary than ever before. The OSCE therefore plays an indispensable role and makes an important contribution to the security of Europe, something that we shall be discussing presently during our lunch.

On 17 July I travelled to Vienna to present the priorities of the French Presidency of the European Union to all our ambassadors. I stressed the need for better co-ordination between our two organizations. Today, I believe I can say that the OSCE and the EU have worked together remarkably well for the benefit of the two organizations.

There are still too many unresolved conflicts entailing too much suffering. Year after year, this ministerial meeting provides an opportunity to take stock of the enduring and deplorable human misery. What is the situation at the end of 2008?

1. First of all, Georgia: the OSCE has been present there for many years and has done a remarkable job. What used to be called “frozen conflicts” in Abkhazia and South Ossetia became extremely serious open conflicts this summer, with the military involvement of two

OSCE participating States. As you are aware, three days after the start of the conflict, Alexander and I, hand and hand representing the OSCE and the EU, went to Tbilisi and to Moscow and obtained a ceasefire.

I wish to solemnly reaffirm today on behalf of the 27 Member States the condemnation by the European Union of the unilateral decision by Russia to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This stand remains unchanged. The European Union urges the parties to continue to implement their commitments and is determined to participate in the most active manner, through its special representative for the crisis in Georgia, in the international discussions launched on 15 October under the auspices of the EU, the United Nations and the OSCE. These discussions should make it possible to deal with all the remaining questions, in particular the modalities for security and stability in the region and the urgent question of displaced persons, including the question of the upper Kodori Valley and the Akhgori region. Our actions must be aimed at promoting stability in the region. In this regard, the EU is not convinced that the deployment of thousands of soldiers and the establishment of military bases in the two separatist regions contributes towards this objective.

The peaceful and lasting settlement of the conflicts in Georgia must be based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. I should like to pay tribute here, on behalf of the European Union, to the outstanding work carried out in sometimes difficult conditions by the OSCE Mission to Georgia. We firmly believe that the OSCE should continue to play an important role in Georgia, including with regard to the conflicts, and I urge all the participating States to take part in the constructive discussions to that end.

2. Serious incidents have occurred this year in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group, operating under the aegis of the OSCE, have continued their efforts to ensure that the principles proposed at Madrid last year remain the basis of dialogue. The Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan met in June at the initiative of the mediators and then in Moscow on 2 November at the invitation of President Medvedev. This meeting, which was welcomed by the European Union, made it possible to reaffirm the central role played by the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group in achieving a negotiated solution. The declaration signed on that occasion regarding the need for a peaceful settlement of the conflict is the first political document ever signed by the presidents of the two countries involved in the conflict and opens up a new phase in the negotiations. Today, just like last year the three ministers of the Minsk Group will meet the ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia to call upon them to take an additional step towards a definitive settlement and to adopt the decisions proposed by the mediators aimed at limiting human losses along the ceasefire line.

3. Transnistria continues to receive our attention. The EU recalls its commitment to a political settlement based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-use of force and the inviolability of the borders of the Republic of Moldova. The negotiations must resume in the "5+2" format as the only means of guaranteeing the transparency and the legitimacy needed to define a lasting solution.

4. Closer to home, the Western Balkans have faced some major challenges this year. We all know how essential their stability remains for security in Europe. The European Union therefore wishes to pay tribute to the determined action taken by the OSCE to consolidate this

stability and the progress achieved in intensifying its relations with the countries of the region. It fully supports the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans announced in the Thessaloniki agenda and the Salzburg Declaration.

Lastly, I should like to mention the EU strategy for Central Asia, which was launched in June 2007 under the German presidency, and has since entered the operational phase and also involves the OSCE. The first EU/Central Asia forum of 18 September on security issues and the Dushanbe conference on border management and drug control in Central Asia on 21 and 22 October underscored the need for all the parties to increase their co-operation to find common responses to the new threats to the stability of the region.

Mr. Chairman,

Sixty years ago the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the founding text from which the Helsinki process has taken its inspiration. We are meeting on the occasion of this anniversary to give fresh impetus to the insistence on the universality of human rights and to the fundamental freedoms promoted by the OSCE.

Our Organization must remain at the forefront of efforts to overcome obstacles to democratic elections and to combat attacks on freedom of expression, association and assembly, the death penalty, torture, ill treatment and arbitrary justice, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and all forms of intolerance, and the scourge of trafficking in human beings. The initiative of the Finnish Chairmanship aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of judicial responses with respect to the victims must be welcomed and more importantly implemented. We must combat these scourges above all in our own countries. The European Union likewise supports the initiative to promote the rule of law in the OSCE area. The OSCE must also be able to do more for defenders of human rights. The European Union would like to see more resolute commitment on the part of our Organization to these men and women who, often putting their own lives at risk, peacefully fight for respect for the universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

For this, we need strong institutions. The role of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is particularly essential. Its autonomy, its impartiality and its professionalism are its strength, especially when it comes to election observation. It is therefore very important that we preserve them, including when they make us aware of our responsibilities, because this is their role, for we have all voluntarily agreed to subject ourselves to its expertise to help us to progress in the right direction. For the same reason, the European Union lends its full support to the office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

Mr. Chairman,

In the politico-military dimension, the progress that you have made during your chairmanship on small arms and light weapons and on stockpiles of conventional ammunition can only gladden the men and women of peace that we are. And more generally, we should welcome the work accomplished on the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security and on non-proliferation.

Since 1990, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) has managed to achieve its objectives. It preserved and proved its viability during a period of fundamental political changes that marked the start of a new era of co-operation and security in Europe. The CFE regime remains a cornerstone of European security. The EU therefore calls on the Russian Federation to immediately resume application of the Treaty and to work with the States concerned to achieve an agreement on the basis of a set of parallel measures to enable us to preserve together the benefits of the CFE regime in a way that contributes to the security of all the OSCE participating States.

The OSCE also plays a significant role in the non-military aspects of security. In this context, the European Union supports the initiatives of the Finnish Chairmanship on border security and management and on combating terrorism, which remains a major concern for our States. The efforts made by the OSCE to support the global strategy of the United Nations must be encouraged.

The European Union attaches great importance to the strengthening of the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE. We are convinced that environmental security is now a fully fledged component of the security of our States. We should therefore like the OSCE to use its powers of persuasion to heighten awareness of this new challenge, the economic, human and security-related aspects of which constitute a growing concern.

I should like to conclude by recalling the commitment of the European Union to the adoption of a decision on the legal status of the OSCE, which will strengthen its effectiveness. If the OSCE is better equipped in legal terms, it will be more effective in finding collective responses to the challenges facing the OSCE and the European Union.

Mr. Chairman,

The European Union is pleased to welcome Greece as the next chairmanship in 2009. We should like to wish Ms. Dora Bakoyannis a successful chairmanship and assure her that the European Union will co-operate fully with the Greek Chairmanship.

Thank you.