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**STATEMENT BY
MR. SERGEY LAVROV, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING
OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Vilnius, 6 December 2011

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished colleagues,
Dear friends,

A year ago at the Astana Summit the Heads of State or Government set a strategic goal of forming a common Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community, which would be based on interests and values that are common to us all, first and foremost on the principle of the indivisibility of security, and harmoniously incorporated into the global system. Such a goal is entirely consistent with Russia's initiative of concluding a Treaty on European Security.

Life has confirmed that the setting of this strategic goal is correct and timely. Our meeting today is taking place at a time of unprecedented upheavals in the regions bordering directly on the OSCE's area of responsibility. The burden of financial, socio-economic, inter-ethnic and intercultural conflicts is growing heavier in Europe itself as well. None of these challenges can be overcome without truly collective efforts.

At the same time, international organizations do not always succeed in responding appropriately to rapidly developing processes. A cause of serious concern on our part are the deliberate efforts to use United Nations Security Council resolutions for unlawful purposes and attempts at interfering in internal State conflicts in support of one of the parties, including the use of force, under the pretext of the "responsibility to protect". There is evidence of double standards being applied in the approaches to different crisis situations. All of this may have very grave consequences. We firmly believe that any deviation from the principle of the rule of law, however plausible the pretexts, will inevitably weaken global and regional security and destroy the foundations on which the OSCE and the entire system of international relations is based.

Respect for the rule of law remains a key condition for ensuring equal and indivisible security. It is only on this basis that we can also move forward in such questions as the modernization of the Vienna Document 1999 and the drafting of a new legally-binding agreement on conventional arms control in Europe.

The task of creating a common security space also requires the development of effective co-operation between the international security organizations operating in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regions. This is a question of developing effective co-operation in line with the 1999 Platform for Co-operative Security and the 2003 OSCE Maastricht Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century. The first steps in this direction were made during the informal ministerial meetings in Corfu and Almaty, and this practice should continue.

The initiative to have academic centres in Russia, Germany, France and Poland carry out an international scientific analysis of the problems connected with the process of forming a common Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security space without dividing lines is likely to be useful. Like the ideas of the OSCE Secretary General, Lamberto Zannier, on this subject, this is a contribution to the efforts to implement the tasks set at the Astana Summit.

More effective responses to transborder threats should be an integral part of our collective efforts. We trust that the Ministerial Council will adopt decisions in that connection to combat trafficking in narcotic drugs, terrorism and organized crime, and threats in cyberspace. Among the common challenges are natural and man-made disasters.

The Organization's approach to different conflicts at all stages – from early warning and crisis prevention and resolution to post-conflict rehabilitation – must be governed by the rule of law and uniform standards. Any attempts to disregard the positions of parties to the conflict are counter-productive. The main responsibility for reaching an agreement rests with the parties themselves, while external actors should urge them to seek compromises and respect the agreed negotiation formats. A lasting settlement cannot be ensured through decisions without consensus.

Guided by these basic approaches, we welcome the official resumption of the negotiations in the "5+2" format on a Transdniestrian settlement, and we will foster their constructive conduct.

The negotiation process on a Nagorno-Karabakh settlement continues most intensively under the auspices of the three Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. We call on the parties to take advantage of the proposals that have been drafted as a result of the contacts made over the last two years at the initiative of Dmitry Medvedev and supported in the joint statement by the presidents of Russia, the United States of America and France in May of this year in Deauville.

The OSCE is obliged to keep a close eye on the situation in Kosovo, which entered a new dangerous phase as a result of the circumvention of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 and the failure of the international presences to observe the principle of status neutrality.

The events of the Arab Spring and the developments in an Afghan settlement mean that there is an increase in the attention being paid to the OSCE's relations with the Partners for Co-operation. We are keen for the people of Afghanistan, the Middle East and North Africa to determine for themselves the path of their own development. The OSCE can, however, make a strong contribution to the international support for these processes, with the leading role played by the United Nations, on the basis of the resources available and the requests of the partner countries themselves.

The recent protests in Europe and the rise in racial and religious intolerance, xenophobia and extremism, including in countries with long-standing democratic traditions, are placing a heavy burden on the OSCE's third basket. It is inadmissible to ignore the activities of extremist groups and neo-Nazis, not to mention the cases of the glorification of the Nazis and their supporters, whose actions were recognized as crimes in the documents of the Nuremberg Tribunal.

In this regard, we believe it is crucial to respond to the appeal made to the OSCE by the non-governmental association Lithuania without Fascism calling for the Organization to examine the rise in nationalistic and neo-Nazi manifestations in Europe.

The problems in the OSCE's human dimension should be dealt with on the firm basis of the Helsinki Final Act and other core intergovernmental documents. The subjective picking out of individual aspects of the human rights topic as "priorities" from the point of view of national political considerations is counter-productive, as has also been confirmed during the efforts to reach agreement on documents for this meeting.

The preparations for the Ministerial Council meeting have also shown once again that the OSCE machinery has stalled, and there is no point at all in producing a mass of documents and commitments, especially when previous commitments are "forgotten", in particular as regards ensuring freedom of movement. It is clear that without a thorough reform of the OSCE and without transferring its activities to a sound legal basis, the Organization will continue to lose its relevance. The relevant draft decisions submitted by Russia and its partners on various aspects of reform deserve the most serious consideration. We ask you to give them due attention at last.

It is important not to forget the main purpose of the OSCE as a collective instrument for ensuring security and co-operation. When all the participating States focus their efforts on drawing up a unifying agenda and achieving consensus by taking one another's interests into account, then we shall succeed in adopting decisions that are significant in practical terms and capable of being implemented. The reform we are proposing is in fact intended to ensure an international legal basis for this work.

In conclusion, I should like to thank our Lithuanian colleagues for the excellent organization of the Ministerial Council meeting and their hospitality, to wish the Irish team every success for next year and to support the candidacy for the OSCE Chairmanship of Switzerland in 2014 and Serbia in 2015.

Thank you for your attention.