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**STATEMENT BY MR. DIDIER REYNDERS,
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS OF THE COUNCIL OF
EUROPE, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE 1044th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

Vienna, 12 March 2015

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The biennium 2014 and 2015 has a number of commemorations recalling the start of the First World War and the end of the Second World War and the defeat of Nazism by the Allied forces. Soon we shall also be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, an important stage in the process of East-West rapprochement, which also led to the creation of the OSCE.

However important these commemorations are as testimony to the respect due to the victims and their descendants, they go well beyond the historical dimension and teach us lessons for the present and future.

They remind us that for all the fratricidal conflicts that Europe has experienced throughout its history, the twentieth century was the most deadly. They remind us as well that Europe has also had its share of horror and extremism. These commemorations teach us well – and above all – that it is only as allies and partners that we can ensure the triumph of what Abraham Lincoln called “the better angels of our nature”. It is with this philosophy in mind that we meet here today.

Following these painful experiences, the European institutions that saw the light of day after the Second World War were set up with the aim of never again having to witness men, women and children suffer or die as victims of ideologies or totalitarian regimes that deny the elementary rights to human dignity. And after Europe was at last reunited after more than 40 years, it enabled us all, the east, centre and west of Europe, finally to come together after having been separated by another totalitarian ideology.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In these years of commemoration, it is our duty to ask ourselves whether, as the heirs of the founding fathers, we have managed to preserve and develop this idea of a common approach to ensure peace and promote human dignity in Europe. This is the question I asked

myself when in November last year I took over the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CECM), based on the programme established by Belgium with the outgoing Azerbaijani Chairmanship and the future Chairmanship by Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The challenges are numerous and sizeable.

In spite of the encouraging developments, the ceasefire in the east of Ukraine remains fragile, and the full implementation of the Package of Measures in support of the Minsk agreements by all the parties involved must be speeded up and consolidated. I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your commitment and efforts and to all the OSCE missions deployed in the field and the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office with a view to de-escalation and achieving a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the conflict.

The increasing manifestations of intolerance and discrimination and the more and more frequent attacks on fundamental rights, and the phenomena of radicalization and violent extremism threaten our societies from within and without.

One aspect of the economic crisis, which has been raging for over six years, is the considerable unemployment that particularly affects our young citizens. The understandable disillusionment of some of them could turn against our society model and call into question the foundations of European cohesion.

In that context, Belgium has highlighted some clear priorities for its Chairmanship of the Council of Europe:

- First, the basic principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law must guide all of our actions;
- Second, our programmes and activities must be aimed at the origin of the problems and be driven by the values that unite the Council of Europe Member States.

It also remains vital to further strengthen and improve the collaboration and synergies between the various international and regional organizations. By emphasizing the special features of each organization we will be able to intensify the synergies between them. I have given a lot of thought to the specific and operational aspects of this question. Just before the start of the Belgian Chairmanship, the Secretary General and myself held constructive talks with the High Representative of the European Union, Ms. Federica Mogherini. Within the OSCE I had several meetings with the Swiss Chairperson-in-Office and I am pleased to be able to continue these meetings with the current Serbian Chairmanship. I look forward to continuing to talk today with the Secretary General, Mr. Lamberto Zanner, and the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Mr. Michael Link. We have elaborated some specific ideas that we are currently discussing in order to further strengthen the existing synergies between the OSCE and the Council of Europe at the political level, between the secretariats, and in the field.

Halfway through its term of office, the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers has concentrated specifically on the action to be undertaken in co-ordination with the OSCE with respect to the Ukrainian crisis. From the start of my Chairmanship I have had consultations with Kyiv and Moscow. On these occasions I conveyed the expectations of the

Council of Europe and of civil society regarding ongoing and future reforms – be they in connection with fundamental rights, democratization, combating corruption – within an inclusive framework with respect for all members of society. The Council of Europe plays an essential role, complementary to that of the OSCE. It remains a platform for dialogue, which is particularly important in these periods of tension. Moreover, it provides essential instruments for strengthening democratic institutions. In that context, I would point to the supporting role that the Council, particularly in the form of the Venice Commission, can play in connection with the Minsk agreements, notably with regard to constitutional reform, decentralization and the organization of local elections.

Our programme also pays particular attention to the ongoing reform of the Council of Europe, especially the framework of the European Convention on Human Rights, with special emphasis on the implementation of decrees by the Court. It is an important organization in its role as the guardian of democratic stability in the 47 Member States. Belgium is organizing a high-level conference in two weeks' time in Brussels entitled "Enforcement of the European Convention on Human Rights: our shared responsibility". Another focus of attention of our Chairmanship in the same vein is the follow-up to the second report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe.

I should also like to point to several cross-cutting topics that have been the object of specific activities:

- Protection of social rights in Europe as part of the Turin process;
- Protection of the most vulnerable persons, in particular women and children, disabled persons and minorities;
- And finally, the cultural dimension.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The attacks in Paris and Copenhagen early this year and on the Jewish Museum of Brussels last year have made the prevention of radicalism and extremism one of the main priorities of our Chairmanship. Our aim is to specifically define the response provided through the fundamental values and instruments of the Council of Europe to the phenomena of radicalization and extremism, which can lead to terrorism. Secretary General Jagland and myself have set ourselves the task of concluding the Belgian Chairmanship at the ministerial meeting on 19 May with a political declaration and action plan. If the state of the negotiations in Strasbourg allow it, we also plan by then to present an additional protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism calling for the criminalization of the act of being recruited or trained as a terrorist. I realize that it is an ambitious project, but these difficult times call for and demand ambition.

As I mentioned, the Belgian Chairmanship wishes to concentrate on the deep-seated origins of these issues. The security and legal aspect of the fight against radicalism is important but we must look beyond it and take account of the long-term challenges, develop educational tools and combat radicalization, particularly in prisons. The Council of Europe has vital instruments for facing up to these long-term concerns. It is with that in mind that I

have taken the initiative of organizing a high-level conference on 8 May in Brussels entitled “Tolerance trumps hate”. We share the values of democracy, the rule of law, openness to the world and tolerance. These values transform diversity into an asset. And this, ladies and gentlemen, is why tolerance trumps terrorism, which has its origins in hate and rejection of others. I am pleased that the Serbian Chairmanship of the OSCE and the Director of the ODIHR have already announced their intention to take part in this event. Other high-level representatives of the academic and political spheres are expected. I look forward to welcoming many high-level representatives of your capitals in Brussels on 8 May, a symbolic date for the whole of Europe.

I should like to wish you all every success in your important work in the interests of the security of our continent and invite you to make the most in your work of the complementarity between organizations.

I thank you for your attention and would be willing to answer any questions you might have.