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Opening Speech by the Chairperson-in Office  
H.E. the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece Mrs. Dora Bakoyannis  
at the Permanent Council of 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009 in Vienna

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the Permanent Council of the OSCE for the first time as Chairperson-in-Office.

Greece assumes the OSCE Chairmanship at a time when the quest for security in our region has become ever more complex, and when rapid, unpredictable change seems to be the only constant in international relations.

In these circumstances, I believe the OSCE remains a vital point of reference within the UN framework.

The OSCE is the only regional forum that encompasses the wider Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regions. It is also rooted in a unique, ambitious concept of security based upon shared values, agreed commitments and the fundamental dignity of the individual.

The strength of the OSCE lies also in its extraordinary ability to adapt to Europe's changing needs and challenges. For over thirty years, our Organization has stood by the peoples of our region in their efforts to realize a vision of stability, democracy and progress for all.

Greece assumes the OSCE Chairmanship inspired by a sense of responsibility and driven by the determination to contribute to the security and stability of our continent and the prosperity of our peoples.

From the very beginning, let me say that I see in the crisis in Georgia both a challenge and an opportunity. This crisis has shaken us out of our complacency, and reminded us that our job is not done. It therefore provides us with the opportunity to look afresh at the mechanisms we have created, to re-dedicate ourselves to the full implementation of our agreed commitments, and to consider new ways to build indivisible security.

Situated at the very heart of Europe's security architecture, the OSCE is uniquely placed to act as a pivot of stability in relations between State, and within them. Lasting peace cannot be built on zero-sum calculations. The inclusiveness and the consensus decision-making of the OSCE, if they are matched with sustained political will, can be our greatest strengths. In

2009, Greece is committed to act as an «**honest broker**» in addressing some of the divisions that have opened among our participating States in recent years. Openness, transparency, and the will to build consensus will guide our efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Helsinki, OSCE Ministers had the opportunity to discuss frankly the challenges facing the OSCE area and the obstacles before us. This discussion showed once again that the OSCE is *the* place for such meaningful exchanges. Greece is committed to carry this dialogue forward, to improve existing structures and to work toward the implementation of all OSCE commitments.

Please allow me to make two remarks in this regard:

First, let us not forget the 'spirit of Helsinki.' This spirit reminds us that genuine security can only be built on two pillars: *indivisibility* -- where the security of all States is linked to that of others -- and *comprehensiveness* -- where the stability of States is tied to the rights of individuals, healthy economic governance and political-military transparency.

Second, honest, good-faith dialogue remains our strongest confidence-building measure. Restoring trust and understanding is a precondition for co-operative security. This dialogue should start from the bottom-up, aiming to the top. The particularly fruitful discussions we held in Helsinki proved that Ministerial Meetings could give the necessary impetus to this dialogue. As I already stated in Helsinki, the Greek Chairmanship is ready and willing to explore the possibility to organize such a meeting, when the time is deemed as appropriate, so as to give to all the participating States the possibility to focus on our common security, with no strings attached as for the timeframes and the rules of procedure to be applied.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No international organization is perfect.

As with other international structures, we must continue to improve the efficiency of the OSCE. This involves the institutional evolution of the Organization as well as its **legal personality**. Participating States have agreed on the need to enhance the legal status of the OSCE. Now is the time to act on this, and Greece is committed to taking forward and finalizing this process.

It has become an unfortunate habit for our budget to be delayed. Such delay impacts negatively on the work and the reputation of the OSCE. The Greek Chairmanship appeals to all of you to reach agreement in the very near future. This is vital for the smooth and orderly planning of OSCE activities.

A priority of the Greek Chairmanship will be to undertake all necessary actions to promote the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts. This is OSCE core business, to which I will be dedicated, as will be my Special Representative, Ambassador Christopoulos.

The role of my Personal Representative for the conflict dealt with by the Minsk Conference, Ambassador Kasprzyk, also remains extremely important. In all cases, Greece is committed to working with all sides in a spirit of openness and driven by the desire for dialogue aiming at practical results.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We value the contribution of the **OSCE Field Operations** in the areas of democratic institution-building. During the Greek Chairmanship, this will remain a main priority and will require effective co-ordination with the host Governments and the Heads of Missions. I look forward to establishing close co-operation with all of them.

I consider the role of **OSCE Operations in South Eastern Europe** as pivotal for promoting democratic institution-building and regional stability. The OSCE role in Eastern Europe is no less important, and I am convinced that that the Organization's contribution to comprehensive security in **Central Asia** can be enhanced significantly. We will support all initiatives to this end, in a balanced and careful way, taking due account of the Organization's work in other regions.

The future of the OSCE presence in **Georgia** requires our special attention.

I regret that the tireless efforts of the Finnish Chairmanship to prolong the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia did not reach consensus. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, the Mission finds itself in a phase of *technical closure*. However, it is evident that the situation on the ground and throughout the region requires *more* OSCE presence, *not less*.

The Greek Chairmanship is committed to maintaining a meaningful OSCE presence in the region. We are striving for a consensus solution, based on OSCE principles and commitments. The OSCE has a long tradition of imaginative and flexible solutions, but these can only work if there is good will and political courage on all sides. I appeal to you today to show such will and courage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE security dialogue remains a vital tool for early warning and crisis management.

In this respect, Greece will continue the practice of previous Chairs of enhancing co-ordination between the Permanent Council and the FSC, by organizing Joint Meetings on topics of common interest and by considering joint decision-making when appropriate. Of course, the FSC does not operate in a vacuum.

Greece is concerned by the continuing lack of clarity over the future of the CFE Treaty. This Treaty must remain a cornerstone of European security, and Greece will do all it can to retain and improve this most important foundation of military transparency and predictability.

I am convinced also that the OSCE has a key role to play in the fight against terrorism. In this respect, I am pleased to underline our intention to promote the implementation of OSCE counter-terrorism commitments, with full respect to the rule of law and human rights.

We will also work hard to support the implementation and further development of OSCE commitments in **border security and policing**. In this respect, we believe that deepening OSCE engagement with **Afghanistan** should remain a priority in 2009 and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our States and societies face difficult challenges in the economic and environmental spheres. The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security provides a strong foundation for targeted co-operation.

This year's 17th Economic and Environmental Forum will examine the cross-dimensional aspects of the migration phenomenon. Uncontrolled migratory movements represent a significant challenge to participating States, and I look forward to a results-driven dialogue as we proceed to the meeting in Athens in May.

Desertification, water scarcity, soil contamination, and environmental degradation -- these challenges also affect us all. If not dealt with appropriately, they can lead to conflict and forced migratory flows. Greece will seek to raise awareness on the possible impact of these issues on the security of the OSCE area.

Climate change constitutes the most serious long-term environmental threat to our region and beyond. I believe that the OSCE can play an important role in this area by focusing on the security implications of this complex phenomenon. We will initiate a multi-level dialogue on this issue, keeping in mind the need to avoid duplication of effort. Our aim will be to underpin and empower the UN.

The Greek Chairmanship will develop the idea of "Greening the OSCE," to promote a more environmentally friendly Organization. On top of improving the every day practice of the Organization this project will seek to provide for a promising new generation of environmental programmes.

The security of energy supplies is a recurring concern. We should recall here the commitments we have all taken to "a predictable, reliable, economically acceptable, commercially sound and environmentally friendly energy supply", achieved by means of long-term contracts where appropriate. The OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, adopted in Maastricht in 2003, should remain a reference point for us all.

The OSCE can also help to ensure that the global financial crisis does not cast a heavy shadow over stability in its region. We stand ready to react as appropriate and in line with the OSCE mandates to consider the potential security impact of the crisis.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE is unique because it is founded on the idea that genuine security between States must rest on a foundation of shared values -- respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the development of societies based on pluralistic democracy and the rule of law.

We have achieved a lot together, and we can do more to prevent the acquis we have crafted from eroding, to adapt it further for new circumstances, and to ensure that we all feel equal ownership of this vital dimension of security.

Respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, as well as the proper functioning of democratic institutions, can never be taken for granted. These are achieved through long, sometimes painful, processes that require constant care and commitment.

Participating States should continue to implement their agreed commitments in the Human Dimension. At the same time, we should help each other in this process, in a spirit of good will.

In the Human Dimension, the Greek Chairmanship will seek to strengthen the broad thematic area of the Rule of Law, guided by a more sober and structured approach. The relevant MC Decision adopted in Helsinki can provide a useful starting platform.

Greece will also give priority attention to gender equality and mainstreaming. It is my belief that the empowerment of women and a stronger emphasis on the need to respect their rights can trigger positive developments within participating States, and positively affect their capacity to fulfill their commitments.

In the area of tolerance and non-discrimination, the Greek Chairmanship will devote particular attention to the situation of the Roma and Sinti as well as the fight against hate crimes. Freedom of religion and human rights education will also be given prominence.

Finally, Greece is dedicated to maintaining the highest standards for OSCE election observation activities. This year will see important elections in the OSCE region, and it is essential that election observation remains a flagship activity of the Organization. Cooperation between the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly remains a key to success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank my colleague, Minister Stubb, and the Finnish team for their unwavering efforts throughout 2008. In the same vein, I look forward to close co-operation with Finland and Kazakhstan in the Troika format during 2009.

I also consider the support of the Secretary General, the Secretariat and the OSCE Institutions vital for the success of our Chairmanship and for the continuity and effectiveness of the Organization.

In the shape of the Parliamentary Assembly, the ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on the Freedom of the Media, we have a unique toolbox, designed to support States and to strengthen the health of their societies. The Greek Chairmanship will draw on all facets of the OSCE comprehensive concept of security and all of the tools that we have created together.

Furthermore, we look forward also to deepening co-operation with the OSCE Partners for Cooperation and our partner international organizations.

In this overall context, I will fully rely on the effective support of all my newly-appointed Personal Representatives, who are all here with us today, in order to help me accomplish, in the best possible way, this challenging assignment.

I take this opportunity to express on behalf of all of us my sincere thanks and appreciation for the excellent work and tireless efforts of the distinguished personalities who have served in these positions under the previous Chairmanships. And we are very much indebted to their contribution and valuable work.

In closing, allow me to underline the three ideas that will guide the Greek Chairmanship:

- **The search for synergy** between all participating States for promoting our co-operative, indivisible and cross-dimensional security.
- **The pursuit of strategy** to design more effective ways to achieve our common goals of guaranteeing stability, security and cooperation in the OSCE area.
- **The concern for symmetry** of efforts in dealing with new “asymmetric threats” and old challenges.

In an evolving international environment, we will seek to make a difference by upholding the values, principles and rules of the OSCE. Together, these constitute the driving force of this Organization and the basis for our co-operative security.

We need each other more than ever, and I pledge that forging stronger ties will be the promise of the Greek Chairmanship. We rely on each and every one of you to help us keep this promise.

Thank you.