

**Remarks of President Petros Efthymiou
to the Ministerial Council of the OSCE
6 December 2011 – Vilnius**

Madame President, Mr. Chairman, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honor to be with you today.

Last year at the Astana Summit, we were promised a new start on the road to a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community. We are still waiting for this new start to materialize. The challenges in all three dimensions persist: the protracted conflicts, the need for serious and substantial modernization of arms control regimes, overwhelming economic and environmental problems, and the persistent, flagrant and unacceptable disregard for basic human freedoms and the fundamental political rights of our citizens.

Let me therefore repeat, yet again, my firm belief that the OSCE is important, not just because of the glory of the past, but because, having an organization which links Europe with Asia and North America using the working methods of the OSCE, is a necessity for the present and the future. In order to be seen as an asset by the international public, this organization has to make greater efforts to be effective and visible by taking relevant and timely political action. Our worst enemy is routine; often enough our routine proceedings suffocate us and limit our ability to come up with visions for the future.

Most of all, successful co-operation requires confidence among states and within them. One prerequisite for trust is the respect for the many cultural and political differences that distinguish us.

That the OSCE is currently experiencing problems taking important decisions, for instance on the 2014 chairmanship, and that we still find it difficult to agree on decisions promoting the protection of journalists and the freedom of speech in the digital age, is a symptom that - despite the progress made during the Corfu process - an absence of trust continues to hamper our work.

We also sense a growing disparity between citizens and those who govern them. The low level of public trust affects multilateral organizations at least as much as national governments, especially in the current economic crisis. The evident lack of democratic structures for fundamental international decision-making has contributed to the growing alienation of decision-makers from the people. In all our endeavors we must remember that we receive our mandates – and our funds - from our citizens, and that we owe them full accountability.

Parliaments are legitimate representative structures who work in an open and transparent manner and who are held accountable through regular elections.

We will therefore not stop pushing for true OSCE reform which enhances transparency and accountability, and includes an enhanced oversight role for the PA in the budget process and the selection of the OSCE Secretary General.

There is also a lack of engagement for the future of the OSCE at the political level in capitals, which MPs can help overcome. As President of 320 members from 55 parliaments I am proud to look back on 20 years of active assistance which our Assembly has lent to the OSCE in all areas of its activities

and in all its regions. We do this as dedicated MPs who believe in the OSCE, and we perform well on a lean budget with a superb small staff in Copenhagen and in Vienna.

To mention just one example: Three times this year we have sent parliamentarians to Bishkek and Osh, and then we led the short term OSCE observer mission to that country's election, in an effort to support conflict prevention. This contributed considerably to strengthening the role of the parliament in this important Central Asian country.

The Action Plan which we considered at the 2010 Astana Summit contained important references to the contributions we as parliamentarians can make at all phases of the conflict cycle. We urge the Ministerial Council to find consensus on a plan for concrete action in situations of crisis.

The OSCE budget must continue to support strongly the work being done in the field. Whenever we visit field presences or organize joint activities, we feel that this is truly the heart of the organization. I repeat that it is crucial to find the political will to re-open OSCE offices in Georgia and Belarus. We continue to offer parliamentary dialogue in order to help Belarus uphold its OSCE commitments.

The Permanent Council needs further reform. At our Annual Session in Belgrade, we urged the Permanent Council to make meetings open to public and press on an ad hoc basis. Meeting exclusively behind closed doors is detrimental to our transparency and our public image. Also, if meetings were open to the public, countries blocking consensus would have to do so in the face of public scrutiny.

We also reiterate our recommendation to modify the consensus rule for personnel, budget and administration matters. Most importantly, during our Belgrade Session we voted that the organization should use the consensus-minus-one rule for "clear, gross and uncorrected violations of OSCE commitments".

Another point we will continue to raise is the lack of women in high-level OSCE positions. We renew our call for a full implementation of the Gender Action Plan.

And we have always spoken out in favor of giving the organization a legal personality.

Observing the recent elections in Tunisia, the OSCE PA has raised the OSCE's profile in the region and demonstrated our willingness to again assist in times of historic change, now in the Arab world. More than ever, we believe that now is the time to increase our co-operation with our present and hopefully future Partners, especially those on the vital southern shore of the Mediterranean.

The OSCE's executive structures must be willing and mandated to engage with the Partners in an effort to strengthen democracy, in close cooperation and upon request by the countries' authorities. I encourage you to work towards building consensus on this issue.

I would like to end by thanking the Lithuanian Chairmanship for their co-operation and for hosting this Ministerial Council in beautiful Vilnius, a city we know very well, as it was the site our Annual Session 2 1/2 years ago. And I wish the incoming Irish Chairmanship a successful year, in the hope that 2012 will be a year of fruitful co-operation.