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DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS AND IMMIGRATION OF THE GRAND-DUCHY OF
LUXEMBOURG, AT THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Helsinki, 4 and 5 December 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Dear Colleagues,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted that 33 years after the signing of the Final Act we find ourselves today in this symbolic city of Helsinki. Rarely has an OSCE Ministerial Council aroused so many hopes and expectations.

We should take the opportunity of this meeting to demonstrate our willingness to overcome our differences in order to give new impetus to our common security project and put it back on track because ultimately the persistence of profound differences and tension between the participating States of our Organization is not in the interests of any of us. It is only by working together and by rediscovering the spirit of solidarity and fraternity that marked the end of the Cold War and reunited the Eastern and Western parts of Europe that we will be able to make Europe more secure, more stable and more prosperous.

After the events that have occurred during the last few months, we need to answer the following questions today:

Do we want to rediscover and renew the spirit of Helsinki?

Do we want to reach a common understanding on our approach to the principal challenges to security for the years to come?

Do we want to overcome our differences in order to progress without calling into question the commitments we have subscribed to since 1975?

I hope that this Ministerial Council will answer these questions in the affirmative.

Political declaration

It is in this spirit that I actively support the adoption here in Helsinki of an ambitious political declaration, which will send a strong message in favour of strengthening co-operative security in Europe.

Mr. Chairman,

The future of security in Europe

Recent statements on the subject of missiles and anti-missile defence have given rise to real concerns in Europe. Such projects are contrary to the ambitions of those who wish to create a new European security system. It is therefore both imperative and a matter of urgency to focus on co-operation to avoid slipping into a negative spiral of threats that could result in a new confrontation and above all a harmful waste of energy and resources.

In this context, the suggestions pointing towards a discussion on a new security architecture in Europe seem interesting to me. I remain deeply convinced that if we can contribute towards greater stability and security on the European continent and if we can do so with the assistance of the United States of America and Russia, Europe will benefit. I fully subscribe to the idea of discussing this within the framework of the OSCE. Indeed, I believe that the OSCE constitutes the natural forum and ideal framework for conducting these discussions. In the meantime, we should refrain from any action that could have a negative effect on our security and that could therefore complicate the discussions that we need to have in order to consolidate our collective security.

Mr. Chairman,

Conflict in Georgia

Even though the OSCE was unable to prevent the conflict that erupted in Georgia in early August, this development placed our Organization back in the centre of international attention thanks in particular to the tireless efforts of the Chairmanship before, during and after the crisis. I also pay tribute to the decisive role played by the European Union (EU) in achieving the signing of a six-point agreement, which resulted in the ceasefire. The EU was then able in record time to set up an observation mission consisting of more than 300 persons and send them to Georgia. This is a successful example of the European security and defence policy.

Through its presence, its long-standing experience in the field and its composition, which includes the parties to the conflict, the OSCE also has an important contribution to make to the peaceful and lasting resolution of this crisis. It does this firstly by co-chairing the Geneva talks, the latest round of which highlighted the importance of stabilization on the ground as a prerequisite if the parties are to find a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The OSCE is contributing to this through its Mission and its observers in the field. Luxembourg also contributed to the deployment of the 20 additional observers, which was agreed upon on 19 August, through a substantial financial contribution. However, to be completely effective and operational, the OSCE observers must have unimpeded access to South Ossetia, and I would strongly urge Russia to respect the commitments it has undertaken in this connection. As for the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, it will expire soon. I should like to join

those who are calling on all the parties concerned to negotiate in good faith a constructive solution that would enable the OSCE to maintain a field presence in Georgia, including in South Ossetia, in order to make an effective contribution to the settlement of the conflict in the interests first and foremost of the population that has suffered so much.

In this context, it would be remiss of me if I did not mention the important contribution that the OSCE is able to make through the joint mission that has just been carried out by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities in Georgia to find solutions with a view to resolving the worrying situation concerning human rights and the rights of minorities in the areas affected by the recent conflict.

Frozen conflicts

The conflict in Georgia should make us redouble our determination and our efforts to give fresh impetus to a peaceful settlement of the conflicts concerning Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the summit that took place on 2 November in Moscow and that resulted in the signing of a common declaration reaffirming the progress to date is an encouraging step — but the conflict has still not been resolved. Is this not the time to adopt a specific road map in favour of a peaceful settlement of the conflict? In this regard, I have every confidence in the three Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group and I should like to pay tribute here to their tireless mediation efforts.

I should also like to pay tribute to the commitment of the Chairmanship, which has succeeded in getting the negotiation process on the Transdniestrian conflict back on track. I urge the parties to return to the negotiating table to conduct in good faith genuine negotiations in the “5+2” format. Lastly, I hope that we will adopt constructive declarations at the Ministerial Council on the resolution of these two conflicts.

Mr. Chairman,

OSCE engagement with Afghanistan

Last year in Madrid, we decided to expand our Organization’s sphere of activity by strengthening the OSCE’s engagement with Afghanistan, a Partner for Co-operation. I am pleased to note in this context that several projects concerned with border security and combating trafficking in narcotic drugs will be launched before the end of the year and I should like to inform you that Luxembourg has decided to make a financial contribution to the project to establish a training centre for customs officers in Bishkek.

Mr. Chairman,

Sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the human dimension

In less than a week, we shall celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the fundamental text of international law and of our system of values and freedoms. I very much hope that here in Helsinki we will adopt an ambitious decision on this subject. This anniversary should also inspire us to strengthen the role of the OSCE in the promotion of human rights and the implementation of our commitments in the

human dimension, which remain one of our Organization's major assets. To this end, it is especially important to preserve and consolidate the institution of the ODIHR, to which I paid a visit at the start of the year, and I should like to pay tribute to its outgoing director, Mr. Christian Strohal, and welcome the new director, Mr. Janez Lenarčič, who assumed office on 1 July as the head of this key institution with internationally recognized expertise in election observation.

I recall that the human dimension and respect for human rights are an integral aspect of collective security and they must remain so. They should therefore be included in the discussions on the future of European security, which I referred to earlier.

This year is also the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration concerning human rights defenders and I regret that this time it has not even been possible to discuss a ministerial decision on these men and women who, sometimes putting their own lives at risk, play a fundamental role in the protection and implementation of this precious instrument that is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I should like to congratulate you and your team on the exemplary work that you have achieved during this extremely difficult year for the OSCE and I wish you every success for this ministerial meeting. I am confident that the incoming Greek Chairmanship will be able to rise up to the many challenges that it will face during the course of next year and I should like to assure it of our full support.