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Preface by the Chairman-in-Office

Helsinki has been associated with many turning points in the history of the OSCE and the relations between our States. In 1975, the “spirit of Helsinki” brought together Cold War rivals and was instrumental in helping to bridge the East-West divide. In 1994, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was transformed into an organization and became a major actor for conflict prevention and crisis management.

Finland adopted the mantle of the OSCE Chairmanship in 2008 keenly aware of and inspired by this history. Finland started its Chairmanship with a sense of the past, a clear-eyed view of the state of affairs in the OSCE area, and an unambiguous commitment to push the Organization further and make maximum use of its potential.

On assuming the OSCE Chairmanship in January 2008, we put forward a set of goals and priorities. I am happy that we have been able to make headway on a number of important issues.

During our Chairmanship, we have underscored the importance of the OSCE’s activities in Kosovo. Our view is that the OSCE mandate to support democratic institutions and the rule of law and to monitor human rights in the region is far from complete. I am glad that despite the diverging views of the participating States on the status of Kosovo, the OSCE has been able to continue its important work on the ground.

There has been some positive movement in the Transdniestrian settlement process. Our aim has been to take advantage of the existing momentum and consolidate the negotiations.

Election observation has been successfully executed in all the important elections held in the OSCE area, with the exception of the presidential elections in the Russian Federation. In the past months, the participating States have also had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue on election-related issues. I hope that this exchange of views has been found beneficial.

The usefulness of the Quintet, which enabled co-operation between the Troika countries of Spain, Finland, and Greece and the two incoming Chairmanships of Kazakhstan and Lithuania, has been proven. I hope that through the Quintet we have been able to promote continuity and coherence in the OSCE’s activities.

We did not assume that our twelve months at the helm of the Organization would be easy, but neither did we expect to witness such a drastic transformation in the European security landscape. The Georgian crisis in August clearly marked a turning point not only for Europe but also for the wider international community. The conflict challenged the existing security structures and put both regional and international organizations to the test.

As the holder of the OSCE Chairmanship, Finland did its utmost to defuse tensions, negotiate and strengthen the ceasefire, and promote a peaceful settlement. The OSCE was able to react swiftly and took an early decision to send additional military monitoring officers to the area.

The OSCE should remain active in working towards a feasible solution to the Georgian crisis. We need to work closely with other organizations and ensure that the negotiations are based on a sound, international foundation.

Over the course of three decades, the CSCE/OSCE has undergone constant evolution. The Organization has shown a remarkable ability to adapt to changes in the European security landscape – from the Cold War to the fall of the Berlin Wall, from the wars in the former Yugoslavia to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The evolution of the Organization is woven into the history of Europe of the last thirty years.

At each of these junctures, the OSCE participating States have shown flexibility and imagination in fashioning a new role for the Organization in a changed landscape. This process of change and adaptation has been gradual, but it has been ceaseless.

My mission statement for the OSCE is threefold. The OSCE is needed:

- to solve conflicts,
- to support transition processes, and
- to bolster co-operative security across the Euro-Atlantic region.

The unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area have become entrenched and long-term obstacles to human security, democratization, and economic development in their neighbourhoods. The international community, the OSCE especially, must invest more in seeking their settlement. I believe that the OSCE should be in the business of resolving conflicts, not just managing them.

The OSCE also works to support transition in its participating States. The commitment that all OSCE participating States have taken to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms includes the pledge to build political systems on democratic principles and guided by the rule of law. These commitments form the bedrock of the OSCE's work. OSCE institutions and field operations are the main channels through which the Organization lends its support to participating States and works to help them make progress in these directions.

The OSCE is a standard bearer of co-operative security from Vancouver to Vladivostok: We do things together in order to increase our common security, and, in this, we act with the participating States, civil society actors, and other international organizations. Our approach must remain inclusive and our concept of security dynamic.

I firmly believe that our Organization can make a difference in these three fields and promote stability, prosperity, and democracy throughout the OSCE area. Building a united and peaceful Europe is a process that is set to

be long and complex, requiring tireless engagement and constant debate about values and their application. Our common goal is to keep the momentum going and the targets in sight.