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**STATEMENT BY
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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF TUNISIA TO THE OSCE,
AT THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Vilnius, 6 and 7 December 2011

It gives me pleasure on behalf of my country to address the meeting of this august Council, which is being held at a time in which a new order is being established in the region and at a moment when Tunisia is experiencing a historic democratic transition.

I should also like to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Lithuanian authorities for the preparation of and welcome to this important conference and for its laudable efforts during its Chairmanship of the OSCE.

Mr. Chairperson,

Tunisia has always been active as a Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation (MPC) since the initiation of OSCE dialogue in Lisbon in 1996. Apart from the various delegations that have been received in Tunisia, my country regularly participates in the different events organized by the OSCE and contributes to the creation of a region of democracy, peace, protection of fundamental human rights, development and prosperity.

In that context, Tunisia presented a document during the Ministerial Council meeting in Helsinki in December 2008 calling for a new vision in OSCE/MPC relations centring on the adoption of an action plan dealing with questions of common interest, the establishment of a conflict prevention centre in the Mediterranean and the extension of the Partnership Fund to all activities by the Organization involving the MPC.

This initiative is based on the relevant provisions of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 linking the permanence of security on the European continent with the promotion of a climate of peace and prosperity on its southern borders and underlining the importance of the Mediterranean dimension in the attainment of the OSCE's aims.

While welcoming the progress that has been made, Tunisia has nevertheless had occasion to regret the absence of specific projects adapted to the special needs of the Mediterranean region and, with this in mind, suggested in 2009 with the support of other countries the adoption of a new approach to the OSCE/MPC partnership based on specific projects relating to conflict prevention through the creation, amongst other things, of a conflict prevention centre in the Mediterranean.

In view of the major changes taking place in the Mediterranean region, we believe it is essential and appropriate that OSCE/MPC co-operation be capable of responding to the new exigencies of the moment.

In this context, I should like once again to thank the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for the energetic and effective support it has shown Tunisia. The deployment throughout the country of its observation teams consisting of 90 parliamentarians, the second largest observation mission that there has been, was part of a move to strengthen dialogue and consultation between the two parties at a particularly important moment in the history of Tunisia in which the Parliamentary Assembly has undertaken to support the transition to democracy, in particular through its assistance in the electoral process to the Constituent Assembly in the name of peace, security and development. The report by this observation mission bears witness to the exemplary success of these elections in Tunisia.

The success of this completely new experience confirms the appropriateness and credibility of the OSCE/MPC co-operation at several levels. It highlighted the important role of European expertise in the democratic transition, particularly through assistance in the electoral processes in the Mediterranean region and the development of a long-term institutionalized culture of democratization.

This experience has also shown that the best way of preventing conflicts and of establishing a climate of peace in the Mediterranean is to strengthen democratic initiatives and to promote and protect human rights in the region in accordance with the principles of inclusive security advocated by the Organization.

In that regard, we should like to take this opportunity to reiterate our appeal to give new dynamism to the Partnership Fund and to involve it in the implementation of specific projects to support civil society, which is the main guarantor of freedoms and human rights, through the organization in interested Mediterranean countries of workshops, seminars and training courses while speeding up and simplifying the decision-making process for the holding of these events.

It is vital that the extrabudgetary contributions to this Fund are in line with expectations and correspond to the needs of the partner countries, which do not have access any more to the Structural Fund, as it is reserved exclusively for OSCE participating States.

Mr. Chairperson,

The popular movements in the region have created an unusual opportunity for the OSCE in particular to help make the Euro-Mediterranean region into an area of democracy, peace, protection of fundamental human rights, development and prosperity.

In this regard, the Tunisian delegation emphasized in the preparatory process the need for this Council meeting to take note of the recent strengthening of OSCE/MPC co-operation and the importance of the role played by the OSCE Parliament Assembly observation mission in the success of the first free, transparent and democratic elections in the Arab world, while stressing the link between support for the democratic process and the security dimension in the co-operation between the parties concerned.

This process has the double merit of highlighting the activities carried out by the Organization while sending out a positive political message designed to encourage interested neighbouring countries to strengthen and expand their consultation and co-operation with the OSCE.

In that regard, the extension of OSCE/MPC co-operation to reform of the media and the police, to gender equality and democratic control of the armed forces confirms the efforts made by my country since March 2011 in this direction.

I should like to mention the exemplary role played by the Tunisian armed forces in ensuring the continuity of the State and its institutions, protection of citizens, creditable management of the massive flow of refugees on our southern borders, the stability and integrity of the country, and the success of the electoral process within the framework of the basic rules governing the democratic control of the armed forces.

Mr. Chairperson,

Our approach to the co-operation desired between the OSCE and the partners is coupled by a call for the identification of a new vision among the Mediterranean partners and a discerning treatment to the benefit of these countries through the establishment of instruments for economic and social convergence resulting in the long term in the free movement of goods, services, capital and people with a view to giving the region greater solidity and prospects and of building a common economic space capable of exploiting synergies between the economies of the region and of consolidating social harmony, growth and sustainable development of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

We are confident that our OSCE partners will continue to strengthen the partnership process in our mutual interests because we are convinced that the success of the Tunisian experience, which we believe in and are working on relentlessly, will have a certain impact beyond its borders.

Our success will also be shared in the framework of this historic progress by our partners, who need to be offered immediate, effective and appropriate support.