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**STATEMENT BY MR. SERGEY LEBEDEV,
CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE
SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT
STATES, AT THE 957th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

27 June 2013

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Permanent Representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I should like to extend a sincere welcome to you all on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). I am extremely grateful to the Ukrainian Chairmanship for the invitation to address the OSCE headquarters at such a representative meeting.

Given the important role of the OSCE in a broad international co-operation architecture, the Commonwealth countries are keen to participate in the work of this Organization. The examination at the meeting of the Council of Heads of State in December 2010 of the question of co-operation of the CIS Member States within the OSCE is revealing in this regard.

The results of the Kazakh Chairmanship received high praise in the document adopted. There was support for its idea of using the OSCE platform to discuss ways of dealing with the global financial and economic crisis and strengthening common security through the promotion of Eurasian integration, and readiness to play an active part in that work was underscored.

The heads of the Commonwealth countries also welcomed Ukraine's election to the OSCE Chairmanship this year and expressed their support for the Ukrainian Chairmanship. I believe that our Ukrainian colleagues feel the full extent of the support from their CIS partners since the priorities set by the Ukrainian Chairmanship are in line with or similar to the aspirations of the Commonwealth countries. In particular, there is a common interest in a successful OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Kyiv on 5 and 6 December of this year.

Three years have passed since my previous statement at a Permanent Council meeting. This has been a difficult but important and successful period for the Commonwealth. The distinguishing feature of this period is that the CIS reached the 20th milestone year of its activities with confidence.

In connection with that date, a corresponding declaration was adopted by the heads of the CIS countries in September 2011. It was noted in that document that the main result of the Commonwealth's work over the past 20 years was the creation of conditions for the progressive development of mutually beneficial co-operation in the national interests of each Member State. A common vision of the future was clearly and unequivocally confirmed in the document: "We, the heads of the CIS Member States, look with optimism to the future and declare our desire to increase the effectiveness and to further develop our Commonwealth as an authoritative regional inter-State organization."

It is well known that within the CIS every State is able to choose those areas of co-operation that are of the greatest interest to it. This has determined the basic role of the Commonwealth in integration at different levels and speeds. It is precisely this experience of co-operation within the CIS that has in many respects served as the basis for the creation of other integration associations in the former Soviet Union – the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Community, the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space. The successful establishment and development of these bodies in turn helps to intensify co-operation in the Commonwealth as a whole.

Distinguished colleagues,

The Republic of Belarus is chairing the Commonwealth this year. Our Belarusian colleagues have devised an interesting and informative concept for their Chairmanship of the CIS under the motto: "Integration for the benefit of the individual: strengthening good-neighbourliness, developing environmental co-operation and expanding a dialogue of cultures". Many forums and conferences aimed at further developing and intensifying multilateral co-operation among CIS countries are taking place in Belarus this year. For example, a meeting of the Council of Heads of Government took place in Minsk on 31 May, a meeting of the ministers of defence was held on 5 June, and a major media forum has just ended. Meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers and the Council of Heads of State will take place in October. We are confident that the Belarusian Chairmanship of the CIS will give fresh impetus to extensive co-operation through integration.

It can be said today without any exaggeration that the key factor in the relevance of the CIS is its focus on achieving concrete results through co-operation that takes account of the interests of each Member State and on adapting to current geopolitical realities.

An indisputable priority here is the development of an effective model of economic co-operation. For example, thanks to co-ordinated joint measures the CIS countries have managed to alleviate the negative consequences of the global financial and economic crisis.

Over the past three years, the gross domestic product in all the Commonwealth countries has tended to grow. The volume of reciprocal external trade has also increased noticeably. While it is true that last year the growth rates slowed down somewhat, this was largely connected with the recession in the global economy and the eurozone.

The need for multilateral co-operation to increase the competitiveness of the Member States' economies was clearly confirmed during practical work to deal with the consequences of the crisis and implement the CIS Economic Development Strategy.

Over the last two years, we have been able to make some progress in strengthening innovative partnerships among CIS countries, and an inter-State programme of innovative co-operation has been adopted. A number of joint innovative projects aimed at intensifying and modernizing CIS economies were approved at the meeting of the Council of Heads of Government on 31 May of this year in Minsk as part of the efforts to implement the programme.

A significant event of recent years was the entry into force in 2012 of the Treaty on the Free Trade Zone. Drawn up in accordance with the rules and standards of the World Trade Organization, it has considerably modernized the legal framework for commercial and economic co-operation by removing barriers to the movement of goods, capital and labour. The agreement on co-operation in the organization of an integrated currency market of the CIS Member States is also intended to facilitate this.

I believe, and I think that you will agree, that for the Commonwealth, which does not have supranational powers, this is a positive result of multilateral co-operation.

Humanitarian co-operation is still one of the priority areas for inter-State collaboration within the CIS. There have been noticeable substantive and evolutionary changes in this area of integration in recent years.

New joint projects have been agreed upon in the areas of science, education, youth policy, public health and information.

In particular, the CIS Network University is up and running, and the Council for Co-operation in Fundamental Science has been set up and has begun its operations. The following instruments have been adopted: a strategy for international youth co-operation, a strategy for co-operation in building an information society, a concept for cultural co-operation, a concept for co-ordinated social and demographic policy, as well as a number of other documents of a long-term nature.

The inter-State programme “CIS Cultural Capitals” is attracting great interest, as is demonstrated by the annually updated list of cities that have achieved this status. Over the last three years they have included Qabala (Azerbaijan), Gyumri (Armenia), Gomel and Mogilev (Belarus), Astana (Kazakhstan), Ulyanovsk (Russia) and Mary (Turkmenistan).

The Council for Humanitarian Co-operation and the corresponding Inter-State Fund of the CIS countries play a leading role in the development and practical implementation of joint humanitarian projects.

An important factor uniting the peoples of the Commonwealth countries is the memory of the war against fascism and the common victory. At a meeting of the Council of Heads of State in Ashgabat last December, a decision was adopted on the preparations to mark the 70th anniversary of the Victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945. The Council of Heads of Government was instructed to draw up a plan of events, and provision was also made for the creation of an honorary order and commemorative medals for veterans.

I am certain that we will all never forget the great feat of those who saved the world from fascism and gave us our future.

Now a few words about co-operation in areas where we are working directly with OSCE institutions. I am referring to election observation in Commonwealth countries.

Over the past three years CIS observation missions have monitored 16 election campaigns in 9 Commonwealth countries. Regular working meetings and contacts with the heads of OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights missions have taken place during the monitoring process. We believe that such contacts are useful since they enable us to exchange views and lead to more objective assessments of elections.

Nevertheless, there is evidently a need for uniform approaches to election monitoring and also for uniform election standards. The CIS countries have gained considerable experience in this area and, most importantly, a significant legal framework, which our observers follow. Last year, we celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms in the CIS Member States. The recommendations for international observers from Commonwealth countries adopted by the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in May 2011 were a significant step in improving the legal basis for international election observation. That document sets out in detail democratic election standards, the principles for and format of international observation, including the organization of long-term and short-term observation, and also methods for the preparation of final reports by missions. We believe it would be useful to use these documents in the elaboration of uniform principles and rules for election observation by the OSCE.

Distinguished colleagues,

At the OSCE Summit in the capital of Kazakhstan in December 2010, the Heads of State or Government set the strategic goal of forming a common Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community, which would be based on interests and values shared by all of us, first and foremost on the principle of the indivisibility of security in its comprehensive system.

Life is confirming the relevance of this task. Virtually every day, the news tells of bloody armed conflicts, sociopolitical and interreligious upheavals and terrorist acts. There are serious risks in connection with the unpredictable situation in the Middle East and North Africa. The potential for conflict in Afghanistan remains high. In that connection, the prospects there following the impending withdrawal of the coalition forces are extremely uncertain.

The need to preserve and strengthen peace calls for joint action by States and international organizations.

In that context, the Commonwealth countries are parties to all the major international treaties and agreements regulating co-operation in such areas as ensuring security, disarmament and countering present-day threats and challenges, and are making a real contribution to their implementation.

Within the CIS, this work is based on the targeted inter-State programmes approved by the Council of Heads of State, and an effective system for co-operation among the competent bodies has also been established. Joint measures are being carried out, with due regard for the leading role played by the United Nations and the need to develop constructive partnership with other international institutions and their specialized structures.

Over the past two days, I have been able to participate here in Vienna in the discussion on problems connected with drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings. I am grateful to the organizers of those conferences and I should like to underscore the importance and usefulness of such meetings.

For obvious reasons the Afghan problem came up during our discussions. In the light of the “2014 factor”, this question is acquiring particular urgency and relevance in terms of ensuring regional and global security.

Primarily, this means strengthening the borders of the Central Asian countries of the Commonwealth with Afghanistan, increasing the effectiveness of the work of counter-terrorism, anti-drug, law-enforcement and customs structures. We believe that to combat the threats emanating from Afghanistan there is a need for a pooling of efforts and close co-ordination of the activities of the CIS, the CSTO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, NATO, the OSCE and other international organizations, with a central role being played by the United Nations.

Unfortunately, it must be noted that present-day threats and challenges are evolving rapidly. There is an aggressive consolidation of money-laundering, drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings and international terrorism. What is more, crime and terrorism are actively extending into new areas, including cyberspace. It is almost impossible to deal with this global evil without collective and complementary efforts by States and international organizations.

The Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States are ready for closer constructive co-operation within the OSCE in this area, which is important for all of us. In particular, it would be useful in our view to step up the working contacts between the Department for Security Co-operation of the CIS Executive Committee and the Transnational Threats Department of the OSCE Secretariat.

Mr. Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The CIS countries support the Helsinki+40 process inaugurated with a view to strengthening the OSCE, ensuring security through the observance by all participating States of the principle of indivisible security, and facilitating further co-operation through the removal of restrictions and barriers.

I wish Ukraine a successful Chairmanship and all of us good luck and success in achieving the noble goals set by the OSCE.

Thank you for your attention.