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REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

STATEMENT

by H.E. Mr. Ivan MRKIĆ,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia
at the 958th Special Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

Vienna, 2 July 2013

Mr. Chairman,
Minister Burkhalter,
Secretary General Zannier,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Ukrainian Chairmanship for today's opportunity to address the Permanent Council together with my Swiss colleague and to jointly outline the vision of our two consecutive chairmanships of the OSCE during 2014 and 2015.

At the outset, let me express my full support for the statement just made by my friend, the Foreign Minister of Switzerland. Serbia fully subscribes to the priorities stemming from our Joint Workplan, which he has just outlined. As we had agreed before we jointly submitted a bid for our chairmanships, the Joint Workplan is a framework document which represents the basis for guiding our two consecutive chairmanships. In our opinion, it contains a balance of priorities and activities in all three dimensions and will contribute to the enhancement of the cross-dimensional cooperation in accordance with the main OSCE documents and decisions, thus strongly reaffirming all undertaken commitments and, at the same time, calling for their full implementation.

Having in mind the present problems and challenges which lie before our Organization, the main idea underlying our coordinated action is to secure continuity, stability and improve necessary long-term planning in the future activities of the OSCE. Having said that, I would like to emphasize in particular the fact that the circulated Joint Workplan has been envisaged as a living document, open for further amendments or adjustments with new ideas or proposals, ensuing either from possible unforeseen events or expected achievements from the ongoing "Helsinki plus 40" process.

Although this is our document, it has been augmented by many valuable proposals, ideas and suggestions given by a number of participating States, as well as the Secretariat. We are grateful to all of you for your readiness to share your views with us and we can assure you that we will steer our work in the same way throughout the next two years. We strongly believe that the notion of joint ownership should prevail in our activities.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

For Serbia, the OSCE chairmanship presents a great honour and recognition of its positive track record in a number of areas, in particular domestic reforms, based on the rule of law, democracy and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, meaningful regional cooperation and earlier successes in some other multilateral fora. Should this chairmanship be successful, it would definitely be one of our biggest achievements in the field of multilateral diplomacy. At the same time, we see it as an honour not only for us, but for the region of the Western Balkans as well.

The Republic of Serbia has taken up this challenge with great diligence and responsibility, setting the framework together with our Swiss friends and partners in a transparent, open and inclusive manner. We also consider that our future chairmanship would be conducive to the further advancement of the overall reform process in our country, on its strategic path towards the membership of the European Union.

In this context, I fully share the position expressed by my Swiss colleague on our joint cooperation, which we see as a potentially new and innovative model of chairmanship. I would like to thank you personally Didier and your colleagues here in Vienna and back home in Bern, for their support and fruitful cooperation.

Our joint endeavours, which many of you have already witnessed, are aimed at establishing an efficient synergy among chairmanships with a view to bringing added value to the Organization, including through greater predictability and continuity in its work. Switzerland, already having the experience of OSCE chairmanship which followed the CSCE/OSCE transformation period in the 90's, is well positioned to steer the current processes in the Organization towards the 40th anniversary and beyond. We are also sure that this partnership will contribute to furthering bilateral relations between our two countries, set for centenary in 2016.

For us, this will be a completely new and unprecedented experience, but, on the other hand, our association with the CSCE/OSCE has been longstanding and dates back to its beginnings. The former Yugoslavia was not only one of the founding participating States, but one of the most active and prominent. At the end of 2015, after almost 40 years, our capital Belgrade will again be the host of a high-level OSCE gathering.

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Minister Burkhalter has very thoroughly described the priorities during the Swiss Chairmanship in 2014 and, as a forthcoming member of Troika and a partner in this endeavor, Serbia is fully committed and stands ready to support and assist. We will present our concrete priorities and ideas during the next year, but I believe that our general orientation is clear from the Joint Workplan.

Therefore, allow me to say just a few words on the perspective until the end of 2015. It is obvious that the “Helsinki plus 40” process should be the main track of activities within the Organization. In one way or another, this process will shape our overall activities.

In accordance with the decision from the Dublin Ministerial Council, we have already embarked upon this journey under the Ukrainian leadership and we are grateful for their efforts. This year we started with our deliberations and have moved to thematic discussions.

Serbia and Switzerland, however, believe that within the next two years we have to ensure that this process yields tangible results. In order to reach a positive outcome we have to open a genuine dialogue among participating States and to prepare a tentative framework through which we will move this process until the end of 2015. In this context, we welcome contributions from think-tanks and academia through the so called Track 2 process. We would also like to support the Secretary General’s Security Days initiative, which has proven as very timely. At the same time, together with Switzerland, we are convinced that strengthening and improving cooperation with civil society is of great importance.

The outcome of this process is directly dependent on our work here in Vienna and the support from capitals. But, it is also dependent on the overall circumstances in which we live, on many global and regional crisis and challenges we are faced with, as well as on our readiness to try to find answers and to work together.

In recent years we have been engaged in a number of similar processes, the Corfu Process, or the “V-V” Dialogue, to name a few. At the last OSCE Summit in Astana, our Heads of States and Governments agreed on a landmark Commemorative Declaration. Regardless of that, we are in

agreement that we need to invest new efforts in order to improve the work and effectiveness of the Organization, to try to renew the trust and confidence among us, but, above all, to agree on the place of our Organization at the beginning of the XXI century.

As strong believers in this security Organization, Switzerland and Serbia are ready to lead this process and call upon all participating States to jointly work towards its new strategic direction.

This new direction should also include the strengthening of the effectiveness of all OSCE structures and, what should particularly be emphasized, securing necessary resources, including through sound budgeting. In that regard, we believe it is necessary to maintain closer cooperation with the Secretariat. Allow me, at this point, to express my gratitude to Secretary General Zannier and his able team for their support as well.

We expect long and, most probably, difficult discussions on many issues, such as resolution of protracted conflicts, new transnational threats and challenges, dialogue on arms control, cyber security, human dimension issues, to name just a few. But every beginning is complicated, therefore we share the view that we have to start from the ones which can unite us. Some of these issues, and maybe even all of them, can be resolved provided that there is enough political will and readiness to listen to different positions, followed by genuine efforts to make a compromise which could lead us to an agreement based on consensus.

Let us be reminded that our predecessors managed to traverse many junctures in the history of the CSCE/OSCE and overcome severe divisions and agree on the way forward. Switzerland and Serbia strongly believe that all of us have to seize this opportunity and show commitment.

Excellencies,
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Let me now turn to the region which I come from. Since the formation of this Government, we have invested exceptional efforts in order to promote stability, prosperity and good-neighborly relations in the region of the Western Balkans. We are satisfied with our results and in particular by the fact that today, more than ever, European perspective of this region is very firm.

Two days ago, Serbian leadership headed by President Nikolić, attended the ceremony in Zagreb on which Croatia became the 28th member state of the European Union. We congratulate Croatia and we believe that this is a very good achievement for the whole region. At the same time, we strongly support efforts of all other Western Balkans countries on their path towards EU.

In that context, we welcome the decision of the European Council to open accession talks with Serbia. This is a very good sign for my country which will give a fresh impetus and boost further the ongoing reform process. It is a recognition of all the positive developments in the recent period and an encouraging sign that Serbia became a reliable partner. Finally, this decision is also very positive for our region's European orientation.

We have invested a lot of efforts in the EU led dialogue between Belgrade and Priština. In April this year, the First Agreement of Principles Governing Normalization of Relations was reached and we are now working on its implementation. In that context, we particularly welcome the assistance of the OSCE in organizing the forthcoming local elections. Last year's assistance of the OSCE in helping conduct our presidential and parliamentary elections in Kosovo and Metohija was of particular importance and clearly showed the capacity of our organization and the strength of its field presences.

Despite many unresolved issues still remaining in Kosovo and with the negotiations on a whole range of important topics still in progress, such as protection of cultural and religious sites, return of IDPs or property rights, to name a few, we are convinced that, with this first agreement, historic progress has been made. Serbia is fully committed to resolving all problems in a peaceful manner and we are oriented towards the future. In that regard, we are looking forward to working with the international presences in Kosovo, including OMIK, which is present under the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 mandate and operates in a status neutral manner.

Serbia is fully committed towards improving regional cooperation. This will be one of our priorities during the chairmanship and, in that context, we expect that the Special Representative for Western Balkans will be of huge importance in assisting all of us, particularly in strengthening horizontal cooperation throughout our region, together with the field presences and other OSCE structures. This will also be important for

further improving not only regional cooperation, but the process of reconciliation as well.

At this point, I would like to mention the OSCE Mission to Serbia, whose work over the period of the past twelve years, in partnership with the Government and the civil society, has been instrumental in institutional capacity-building and fostering of reform processes in key sectors, thus facilitating our preparations for the forthcoming EU accession processes. We will continue to count on the Mission's support in the run-up to and during our OSCE Chairmanship.

Excellencies,
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By adopting the Astana Commemorative Declaration, we have set before us a vision of a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian Security Community stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok. I believe that all 57 participating States are fully committed to this goal.

If we want to achieve this goal, we should try to use some important advantages OSCE is known for, such as its comprehensiveness, adaptability and flexibility. It is inevitable that security remains at the core of all activities, as OSCE is recognized as the widest platform for dialogue. However, the precondition for going ahead is to improve confidence among us and to dispel the misperceptions sometimes based on lack of trust.

Switzerland and Serbia, as future chairs, call on you to jointly renew our engagement in responding to today's challenges and threats, in order to improve confidence and trust to the benefit of our Organization and the participating states.

Thank you very much.