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**Chairmanship: Finland****720th PLENARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

1. Date: Thursday, 10 July 2008

Opened: 10.05 a.m.

Closed: 12 noon

2. Chairperson: Mr. A. Turunen

Prior to taking up the agenda, the Chairperson, on behalf of the Permanent Council, expressed condolences to Afghanistan (Partner for Co-operation) and Turkey in connection with the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul and Istanbul. The Council then observed a minute of silence.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Permanent Council, welcomed the new Permanent Representative of Belgium to the OSCE, Ambassador Geneviève Renaux.

3. Subjects discussed — Statements — Decisions/documents adopted:

Agenda item 1: REVIEW OF CURRENT ISSUES

- (a) *Recent developments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia:* France-European Union (with the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro; the European Free Trade Association country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine, in alignment) (PC.DEL/605/08), Norway, Canada (PC.DEL/611/08), Russian Federation (PC.DEL/615/08 OSCE+), United States of America (PC.DEL/607/08), Georgia (PC.DEL/618/08 OSCE+), Chairperson
- (b) *The case of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in Kyrgyzstan:* Norway (PC.DEL/608/08), France-European Union (with the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the

European Economic Area; as well as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, in alignment) (PC.DEL/604/08/Rev.1), United States of America (PC.DEL/606/08), Kyrgyzstan

- (c) *Popular constitutional initiative on minarets in Switzerland: Switzerland (Annex)*
- (d) *Meeting of the Union of Liberators of Estonia, held in Märjamaa, Estonia, on 5 July 2008: Russian Federation (PC.DEL/613/08 OSCE+), Estonia (PC.DEL/609/08)*
- (e) *Visit of the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to Moldova from 2 to 4 July 2008: Moldova (PC.DEL/612/08)*
- (f) *Thirteenth anniversary of the massacre in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bosnia and Herzegovina (PC.DEL/616/08)*

Agenda item 2:           REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE  
CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE

*Announcement of the distribution of the report on the activities of the  
Chairman-in-Office (CIO.GAL/103/08): Chairperson*

Agenda item 3:           REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

- (a) *Announcement of the distribution of the report of the Secretary General: Secretary General*
- (b) *Participation in the meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, held in Brussels on 9 July 2008: Secretary General*
- (c) *Annual High-Level Tripartite Meeting between the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the United Nations and partner organizations, held in Strasbourg, France, on 7 July 2008: Secretary General*
- (d) *OSCE-Council of Europe meeting at the level of senior officials, held in Strasbourg, France, on 8 July 2008: Secretary General*
- (e) *Model OSCE conference, held in Vienna from 4 to 7 July 2008: Secretary General, Chairperson, Serbia*

Agenda item 4:           ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (a) *Security situation in Afghanistan: Afghanistan (Partner for Co-operation) (PC.DEL/619/08)*
- (b) *Parliamentary elections in Belarus, to be held on 28 September 2008: Belarus (PC.DEL/610/08)*

- (c) *Third Summit of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development — GUAM, held in Batumi, Georgia, on 1 July 2008: Georgia*  
(PC.DEL/617/08)
- (d) *Matters of protocol: Liechtenstein* (Dean of the Permanent Council), Spain,  
Chairperson

4. Next meeting:

Thursday, 17 July 2008, at 10 a.m., in the Neuer Saal



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Permanent Council**

PC.JOUR/720  
10 July 2008  
Annex

ENGLISH  
Original: GERMAN

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**720th Plenary Meeting**

PC Journal No. 720, Agenda item 1(c)

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF SWITZERLAND**

Mr. Chairperson,

I should like to briefly inform the Permanent Council of a political event in Switzerland that concerns the human dimension of the OSCE.

On 8 July 2008, a popular initiative was submitted to the Swiss Federal Chancellery in Bern, the purpose of which is to prohibit the building of minarets in Switzerland.

Under the Swiss system of direct democracy, citizens can at any time, provided that they have collected at least 100,000 signatures, call on the Government and Parliament to amend the Constitution. Whether in such cases the Constitution is *actually* amended depends on a number of different factors. In any case, the Swiss population ultimately decides via a referendum: Only a proposed amendment that is simultaneously supported by the majority of the population and the majority of the cantons (regions) can acquire legal force.

Accordingly, a popular initiative is not a decision under law but merely the start of a political process that may last several years and whose outcome is by no means certain in advance. Before a proposed constitutional amendment can be voted on, the Swiss Government and Parliament must, among other things, verify whether the popular initiative submitted is compatible with international law. In advance of the referendum, the Government and Parliament will also prepare a recommendation indicating whether the popular initiative should be rejected or accepted.

The purpose of the popular initiative that has now been submitted is to supplement the Constitution with a provision that would prohibit the building of minarets, but not the building of mosques. What is involved here is an initiative put forward by individual persons and not by the Government or Parliament. While indeed referring to the building of minarets, its aim is not to restrict freedom of religion in principle. The Swiss Constitution guarantees the right to free choice and to the free profession of religious belief and philosophical doctrines.

For some time now, the subject of this popular initiative has sparked intensive debate within Swiss society. Discussions of this kind are a normal part of the shaping of political public opinion in a direct democracy. It is interesting in this connection to note that so far the

opponents of the minaret ban are clearly in the majority. Various cantons have — independently of the popular initiative that has now been submitted — already spoken out against a ban on the building of minarets, for example the Parliaments in the cantons of Solothurn, St. Gallen and Bern in the summer of 2006. In June of this year, the Parliament in the canton of Zurich also voted with a large majority against the minaret ban and declared such a ban to be unconstitutional and contrary to international law.

The popular initiative that has now been submitted calling for the banning of minarets is expected to be put to the vote by the Swiss population in 2011. In its initial official statement, the Swiss Government expressed itself as follows: “It is altogether certain that the Council of Ministers (*Bundesrat*) will recommend to those entitled to vote and to Parliament that they reject this initiative”.

Mr. Chairperson,

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of today’s meeting of the Permanent Council.

Thank you very much.