



**Opening Speech by the Chairperson-in Office
H.E. the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece Mrs. Dora Bakoyannis
to the Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Vienna 19 February 2009**

Mr. President,
Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a special pleasure to speak before the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

It goes without saying that as a parliamentarian, I fully appreciate the significance of this body to the work of the OSCE as a whole.

In many ways the parliamentary assembly is the flagship of the OSCE. It represents our mutual commitment to contribute to the security and stability of our continent and the prosperity of our peoples.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly helps to drive forward the political dialogue among participating States, and it allows parliamentarians and, by implication, their constituents, to participate in that dialogue. Since its creation in the Charter of Paris of 1990, the Parliamentary Assembly has become vital for the good health of the OSCE.

When times are as challenging as they are now, the support of the Parliamentary Assembly becomes all the more important.

I wish to touch on two areas with you.

First, I will present the priorities of the Chairmanship this year, before turning to address some of the urgent questions the OSCE participating States face today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2008 saw a serious crisis in the Caucasus. Lives were tragically lost in Georgia, and persons were and remain displaced from their homes. This crisis should serve as a wake-up call to us all.

It should remind us that we must do all we can to defend that which we have achieved, because it is fragile.

Since January 1st, the OSCE Mission to Georgia finds itself in a phase of technical closure.

The position of Greece is clear: the current crisis demands that the OSCE should do more in Georgia, not less.

The OSCE's experience in the region, its diverse toolbox, its inclusiveness and its comprehensive approach to security are unparalleled assets for the international community.

For those most directly affected by the conflict, these assets are irreplaceable. We must have the political courage to do what it takes to make the most of these resources.

I am deeply committed to maintaining a meaningful OSCE presence in the region.

Last Thursday, the 56 participating States agreed to extend the military monitoring activities of the Mission until June 30th.

I take this a sign of good will and as recognition of the enduring need for the OSCE on the ground. But it is only a beginning. Let us build on this - here in Vienna and also in the Geneva Discussions, of which the OSCE is Co-Chair.

We must still address the long term questions of building stability on the ground throughout the region.

The OSCE presence will be vital here. The Greek Chairmanship will work ceaselessly for a consensus solution on a future OSCE presence, based on OSCE principles and commitments. I appeal to all parties for their good will and courage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greece has an ambitious agenda this year, guided by a single aspiration: to serve as an honest broker for all OSCE participating States.

As a first priority, we will focus on crisis management. This is OSCE core business, and I am grateful for the dedication of my Special Envoy, Ambassador Christopoulos. I would add that this work is already paying off on the ground - for instance, in helping to restore gas supplies to South Ossetia.

The Greek Chairmanship is also seeking to improve the OSCE's efficiency and effectiveness.

This involves the institutional evolution of the Organization as well as its legal personality. As you know, participating States have agreed on the need to strengthen the legal status of the OSCE.

Greece is committed to taking this process as far as possible.

Our priorities are clear in the three OSCE Dimensions.

I am convinced that the OSCE has a key role to play in the fight against terrorism.

In this respect, our intention is to promote the implementation of OSCE anti-terrorism commitments, with full respect for the rule of law and human rights.

We will also work hard to support the implementation and further development of OSCE commitments in border security and policing. In this respect, we believe that deepening OSCE engagement with Afghanistan should remain a priority in 2009 and beyond.

This year's 17th Economic and Environmental Forum examines the cross-dimensional aspects of the migration phenomenon. Uncontrolled migratory movements represent a significant, multi-dimensional challenge to participating States. I am pleased that a results-driven dialogue has started as we proceed to the meeting in Athens.

I am convinced that the OSCE should play a role in helping to address the long term threat of climate change. We will initiate a multi-level dialogue on this issue, aimed at underpinning the UN's efforts.

The start of this year showed the challenge also of ensuring the security of energy supplies. The OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, adopted in Maastricht in 2003, provides a reference framework of commitments, as well as a starting point to undertake a working-level dialogue.

In the Human Dimension, the Greek Chairmanship will seek to strengthen the broad thematic area of the Rule of Law, on the basis also of the platform provided by the relevant MC Decision adopted in Helsinki.

Gender equality is also a priority. I am pleased to build on the work of the Finnish Chairmanship in 2008 in this vital area.

The Greek Chairmanship will also devote particular attention to the situation of the Roma and Sinti and to the fight against hate crimes. Freedom of religion and human rights education will be given prominence as well.

Finally, Greece is dedicated to maintaining the highest standards for OSCE election observation activities.

This year will see important elections in the OSCE region, and it is essential that election observation remains a flagship activity of the Organization.

Needless to say, co-operation between the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly remains a key to our common success.

My last point concerns the Unified Budget. It has become an unfortunate habit for our budget to be delayed. This cannot go on. It is vital for the good health and the reputation of the OSCE that we reach agreement very soon. I appeal also to your support in this respect.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2008 also provided us with an opportunity to begin wider discussions on European security, to re-commit ourselves to the principles that guide our Organization and to better understand and overcome the problems that divide us.

The first high-level, multilateral discussion of the ideas put forward by President Medvedev, President Sarkozy and others for renewed dialogue on European security took place during the Helsinki Ministerial Council. The former Chairman-in-Office, Alexander Stubb, invited OSCE Foreign Ministers to a working lunch to discuss 'the future of security in Europe.' Fifty Ministers attended, and many partook of the debate.

These exchanges confirmed that the OSCE is the natural platform for pan-European discussions. Its inclusive composition and its signature concept of comprehensive and cooperative security remain unparalleled across the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian landscapes.

Greece stands ready to organize meetings at any level with the aim of facilitating further dialogue. The OSCE's experience in this area is very flexible, and offers many different ways to take this process forward.

In this effort, three principles can help guide us.

The first is modesty. We have come a long way since the Cold War. Walls have been torn down and families reunited. But the job is not done. Some

participating States feel that we have not yet overcome all dividing lines in Europe.

So, let us take every invitation to dialogue seriously.

If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we can do more to foster indivisible security throughout the OSCE region.

A second principle is consolidation. Even as we explore new paths, our point of departure must be what we have already achieved.

The OSCE area is rich in experience and with organisations mandated to develop common security. The OSCE has a special place in this architecture. It is the only regional forum joining the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian areas.

It is the only organization in our region rooted in an ambitious concept of security based upon inclusiveness, shared values and a comprehensive concept of security. As we consider new initiatives, let us build on the ground that we have cleared already.

A final principle is to make haste slowly. We should take the time required to prepare a positive agenda, to consider all options and consult widely.

When the Heads of State and Government of the CSCE met in Helsinki in 1975, the participating States had held more than 2400 meetings in Geneva, and deliberated on 4,660 proposals. So, if we aim for a "Helsinki Plus," let us not forget the careful work this will require.

Mr President, Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Times are not easy for the participating States and for our societies. The Economic crisis throws a shadow over all developments and will affect us in ways that are still unpredictable.

When the international system faces such flux, it is our responsibility to consolidate the pillars of a rules-based international order. The OSCE is one of these pillars one that has proven its resilience and utility over time.

At the heart of the OSCE remains the principle that security starts with the 'inherent dignity of the human person'. Security requires politico-military co-operation between States, the development of healthy economic and environmental governance, and the protection of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This cross-dimensional approach is as relevant today as it was in 1975.

The strength of our Organization lies also in its extraordinary ability to adapt to Europe's changing needs while keeping true to this foundation of shared values.

Challenging times underline also the responsibilities shared by all members of the OSCE family. The structures that make up the OSCE were created with a single objective to assist the participating States in implementing the commitments they have entered into in defining new ones in response to new needs.

This is our common *raison d'être*. Only on this foundation can we move together towards fostering greater security through co-operation across such a varied and diverse area as the OSCE.

Thank you for your time.

I look forward to your questions.