

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs, Foreign Minister of Latvia
OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting on 5 – 6 December 2013 in Kyiv**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Ukrainian Chairmanship for its work during the whole year and professional preparation of the 20th Ministerial Council here in Kyiv. The principles and objectives enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act have been with us for decades and they continue to guide us through challenging times. Today here in Kyiv it is of utmost importance to recall those principles relating to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and non-intervention in internal affairs. The people in Ukraine and everywhere else should be able to express their legitimate concerns and aspirations in an environment free from fear of intimidation and without external pressure.

Also I would like to align myself with the statement of the EU.

Let me share some thoughts on current OSCE issues.

Latvia welcomes the initiative of **Helsinki+40** launched by Irish Chairmanship last year and the successful continuation of the process under Ukrainian Chairmanship. Latvia is fully committed to join efforts with forthcoming Swiss and Serbian Chairmanships and all other members of the OSCE towards achieving a long-term ambition of establishing a true security community. The Helsinki+40 process should continue to be inclusive, with strong member state ownership and oriented towards achieving gradual and feasible progress across all three OSCE dimensions.

Mr. Chairman,

Resolution of **the protracted conflicts** is a priority pre-condition for achieving the security community in the OSCE area. We look forward to the next Chairmanship's plans to keep this issue high on the OSCE agenda.

In 5+2 negotiations on conflict resolution **in Moldova**, it is important to begin discussion on political settlement and institutional issues without delay. Effective implementation of confidence-building measures and good bilateral contacts at the political level are essential for further success in conflict settlement. Replacing the current peacekeeping format with an international mission of civilian observers would be a pragmatic step towards conflict settlement. We praise the efforts of the Ukrainian Chairmanship in fostering 5+2 discussions and in facilitating dialogue between Moldova and Transnistrian region.

In Georgia, we are concerned about further borderization of the Administrative Boundary Line of breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We understand the complicated international background of the Geneva talks. However, it is vitally important to continue discussions and meetings in this format. Obligations of all sides under the six-point ceasefire agreement of 2008 should be entirely fulfilled. Restoration of a meaningful presence of the OSCE in Georgia is a rational way forward. It would positively augment Geneva talks and contribute to the conflict settlement.

The recent Vienna meeting was a positive development in the challenging **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict settlement process. This positive trend should be continued. The sides should abstain from hostile rhetoric and concentrate on confidence building. Conflict should be resolved only by peaceful means and diplomatic efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

In the coming years enduring international engagement will be crucial in supporting further progress in **Afghanistan's** internal reforms, in strengthening democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, as well as in achieving more sustainable economic development there.

One of the key elements is continuation of the international support to the security sector reforms, including through the training and advisory mission. Latvia is committed to provide its contribution pending on the planning of the post-2014 mission and the Afghan needs.

Closer dialogue and practical cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asian states would promote peace, stability and sustainable development in the whole region.

We highly appreciate the role and engagement of the OSCE in **the Central Asian region**. Border management and prevention of transnational threats are of utmost importance. Latvia is stepping up its assistance to Central Asian region and it will our priority during Latvia's EU Presidency in 2015.

Mr Chairman,

Touching on one of the existing tools, which promotes confidence among all States Parties, we believe, that efforts to revitalize the work of the **Open Skies Consultative Commission** should be strengthened. This approach will guide us during the Latvian presidency of the Commission in 2014.

Mr. Chairman,

Latvia appreciates the cross-dimensional work of the OSCE and attaches great importance to **the human dimension** in the OSCE concept of comprehensive security.

Latvia as a member of Freedom Online Coalition consistently supports initiatives aimed at an open and free internet and strongly defends the principle that the same universal rights that individuals enjoy "offline" must also be upheld and protected online. We support the strengthening of the implementation of the commitments to ensure freedom of expression, freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and of association, and the safety of human rights' defenders and journalists.

It is regrettable to observe that, in several OSCE Participating States, legislative and de facto restrictions are being continuously imposed on the activities of the civil society, NGOs, journalists and different minority groups. Such steps are contradictory to the norms and principles of the OSCE. Latvia firmly believes that commitments in the human dimension should be fully respected and implemented.

Dear colleagues, finally let me welcome Switzerland, as the incoming Chairmanship. I wish Switzerland every success in tackling the tasks ahead. We look forward to work closely with you in order to solve most complicated issues together.

Thank you!