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## **The Netherlands Presidency of the European Union**

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**12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Sofia  
6-7 December 2004**

**Statement by Bernard Bot,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands,  
on behalf of the European Union**

Mr Chairman, Mr Secretary General, distinguished colleagues and friends,

It is with great pleasure that I take the floor on behalf of the European Union at this twelfth Ministerial Council meeting. I would like to thank the Chairman-in-Office and his team for giving us all a most cordial welcome, here in the beautiful city of Sofia. May its name – which means “wisdom” – inspire us all today and tomorrow.

The OSCE is standing firm in the midst of change. If it is to hold its ground, however, it must continue to adapt to changing environments. Otherwise it will surely lose its relevance in the new Europe. The OSCE has played a central role in shaping today's security environment. The European Union firmly believes it should and will continue to do so in tomorrow's security environment.

The scourge of terrorism has already forced us to rethink our priorities. The decisions we adopt here in Sofia will be important in further defining the OSCE's role in fighting terrorism. But adapting to changing environments does not mean we need to start from scratch. On the contrary: the OSCE is firmly rooted in its three dimensions – politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. Each of these dimensions has a valuable role to play in the fight against terrorism. More importantly, these three dimensions – and the way they interrelate – make the contribution to security and stability in and around Europe of the OSCE unique and complementary to that of other international and regional organisations.

Lest we forget, the OSCE acquis entails a comprehensive approach to security through co-operation. To the European Union a cornerstone of the OSCE acquis is that the internal affairs of the participating States are the legitimate concern of each and every one of us. To the European Union, moreover, the human dimension is of crucial importance to this approach. To suggest that there should be a better balance between the three dimensions can only mean that more effort should be put into each of them. So that together, they contribute more to comprehensive security.

Can the OSCE be more effective by improving its efficiency? Undoubtedly. Every organisation must constantly re-assess its performance in the light of changing circumstances. But it is equally important to remain sensitive to the origins of the organisation. The OSCE should evolve, but that implies moving on from what has already been achieved. It does not – and in the opinion of the European Union should not – mean undoing those achievements.

The European Union therefore invites the OSCE to consider how it can better utilise existing instruments in shaping OSCE's role in changing environments. The European Union would support a decision to set up a panel of eminent persons – the "Sofia Group", perhaps? – to look into and propose measures to strengthen the effectiveness and performance of the OSCE. Measures that would better equip the OSCE to meet current and future challenges.

No matter how successful we may be in improving the effectiveness of the OSCE, we cannot achieve very much without the necessary financial resources. We must reach agreement on the way we finance the institutions and activities of the organisation. The European Union urges all participating States to show flexibility on the issue of the scales of contribution.

The OSCE area spans three continents, from Vladivostok westwards to Vancouver. Within this vast space of diverse peoples and cultures, enhancing security and co-operation is of enormous importance. Both are fragile and are of common concern to all participating States. We cannot and must not close our eyes to the many problems faced by participating States. Both within and across their borders. The European Union acknowledges the tremendous work of the OSCE institutions, missions, centres and presences, in helping resolve conflicts and crises.

One of the challenges faced by the participating States, is how to ensure that every citizen, no matter what their colour, creed or race, is able to fulfil their potential. The European Union reiterates that racism, xenophobia, discrimination, anti-Semitism, and any other form of intolerance, have no place in our societies. The European Union welcomes the appointment of three Personal Representatives to identify effective ways to combat all forms of intolerance.

Of particular concern to the European Union are the ongoing conflicts in Georgia and Moldova. We would urge all parties involved to continue to search for ways to bridge differences and bring an end to these conflicts. The European Union hopes that progress can be achieved in Georgia and Moldova in the near future. The European Union is interested in the notion of a declaration on security and stability in Moldova and is prepared to continue consultations on this issue. The fulfilment of the Istanbul commitments, in particular with regard to the withdrawal of Russian forces and equipment from Georgia and Moldova, remains key to the resolution of the ongoing conflicts in these countries.

Democracy is a fragile commodity that demands constant attention. The European Union is disappointed and concerned that some participating States still fail to meet OSCE standards for free and fair elections. It urges these States to work more vigorously at meeting them.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me address the current situation in Ukraine. I would like to congratulate all parties concerned that they are working their way out of a complicated and politically

tense situation, without resorting to violence. Now that the re-run of the second round of the presidential elections in Ukraine will be held on December 26, it continues to be of the utmost importance to ensure the integrity of the election process. Therefore, I urge all OSCE participating states – and I underline all – to heed the call of ODIHR to send observers to these elections. The events since November 21 have, for the EU, underlined the relevance of the Helsinki-principles and the OSCE acquis. Aren't we all, as we are gathered around the table here in Sofia, committed to the OSCE commitments and standards? The efforts of the EU continue to be directed at helping to find a way out of this crisis in a non-violent manner, while ensuring that democratic principles prevail and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine is preserved.

The European Union remains concerned about developments in Belarus. It considers that there is a place for a democratic Belarus in the European family of nations. We again urge the Belarusian authorities to start developing good relations between the government and civil society in a constructive manner, using the available assistance of the OSCE.

For the European Union, democracy is fundamental to progress. A well-functioning democracy upholds the rule of law and the fundamental human rights of its citizens, and promotes good governance. These values are of utmost importance to securing peace and prosperity, and advancing cooperation at all levels. As participating States of the OSCE, we should feel obliged to live up to these values in every way.

Mr Chairman,

We live in challenging times. The world is constantly changing. We might sometimes be tempted to feel that it is changing for the worse. The European Union is living proof that this is not true: this year saw the arrival of ten new Member States. Countries that were once adversaries now stand and work together for a brighter future. The OSCE should take courage from this kind of change, just as the European Union draws on the tradition of co-operation that has developed in the OSCE in the last thirty years. The European Union stands ready to take up the challenge of defining the proper role of the OSCE in the changing security environment in the knowledge that the OSCE will be the better for it. I look forward to fruitful deliberations today and tomorrow, and wish us all every success in making the right decisions for a better future.

Finally, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I am pleased to announce that the Dutch government is very happy to continue to host the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities in The Hague.

Thank you.