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**STATEMENT BY MR. MICHAEL SPINDELEGGER,
FEDERAL MINISTER FOR EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA, AT THE SEVENTEENTH
MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Athens, 1 and 2 December 2009

Mr. Chairman,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I should like, on behalf of the Austrian delegation, to thank the Greek Chairmanship for its efforts and hospitality.

On 6 November I took part with the former German Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and the Alternate Foreign Minister of Greece Dimitris Droutsas in an official commemoration at the OSCE headquarters in Vienna of the historic events 20 years ago and the role of the CSCE in the new Europe.

The celebrations to mark the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall clearly reminded us that at the basis of this historic change was the desire of the peoples concerned for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These are precisely the values for which the OSCE stands and without which security and stability in the OSCE area would be inconceivable. For that reason, the commitments we have undertaken, particularly in the human dimension, should not be questioned. In this area the OSCE institutions perform outstanding and essential work, for which they deserve all of our thanks.

As far as the future of security in Europe is concerned, I should like to point out that from the very outset Austria has been in favour of embedding this discussion within the framework of the OSCE. The discussion needs to be conducted on the basis of the wide-ranging and comprehensive security concept developed by the CSCE/OSCE in the last 35 years. We welcome contributions by international organizations, civil society and experts. I am highly appreciative of the efforts of the Greek OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister George Papandreou, to give structure and content to this discussion through the Corfu Process with a view to achieving a higher degree of understanding and mutual trust among all OSCE participating States. Today's meeting should not only provide the stimulus for continuing this work, but should also point the way to further discussion. We need to find a modus operandi for proceeding and therefore explicitly support the efforts by Greece for a ministerial decision and declaration on the Corfu Process.

I am firmly convinced that the door to a high-level meeting, possibly even a summit, providing it has a substantive basis, should remain open and would welcome it if consensus were to be reached on this matter.

Vienna is willing to remain as a hub for discussions and will continue its common agenda with the OSCE, including the financing of retreats, seminars and meetings. As a member of the European Union (EU) we welcome the entry into force today of the new EU Treaty, which will further strengthen the weight and voice of Europe in international issues in future, also in the OSCE and other organizations.

Austria very much regrets the closing of the OSCE Mission to Georgia. We remain convinced that an international and all-embracing presence throughout Georgia is still of essential importance, among other things to improve the security and humanitarian situation. We support the ongoing endeavours by the OSCE Chairmanship to safeguard an OSCE presence in Georgia and expect the incoming Chairmanship to continue these efforts. Like our EU partners, we persist in calling for respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders.

For many years, the Balkan region has been an Austrian foreign policy priority. This can also be seen in my country's contributions to the military and civilian missions in the countries of the Western Balkans. We support and welcome the valuable work of the OSCE field presences in this region. It remains our stated aim to ensure stability in a multi-ethnic Kosovo.

At the Ministerial Council meeting in Madrid two years ago, all OSCE participating States decided to increase their commitment to the stabilization of Afghanistan. We are now all called upon to make a contribution to this goal through specific projects inside and outside Afghanistan. Austria has therefore increased its support for OSCE border management projects in Central Asia, focusing particularly on projects that provide additional security along the Afghan border.

I am extremely gratified to note the very successful collaboration on election monitoring this year between the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. This independent monitoring by the ODIHR in co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly is an internationally recognized core competence of the OSCE that we should not jeopardize. It would therefore be useful for the formula for co-operation established this year to be continued in the future.

Austria welcomes the OSCE-wide consensus for strengthening the economic and environmental dimension. As an important regional platform for dialogue, however, the OSCE should also concern itself with energy security and the security aspects of migration and climate change.

Thanks to its operative and flexible method of working, the OSCE has performed outstandingly in conflict management and prevention. As we all know, however, unclarified legal questions repeatedly obstruct the OSCE's work. I therefore appeal to all participating States to adopt as soon as possible the convention on the international legal personality, legal capacity, privileges and immunities of the OSCE that was finalized back in 2007. This step has been prepared very well over a very long period. We are also willing to discuss other

unclear legal questions but the adoption of this convention is important and should not be further delayed.

We are extremely grateful to the Republic of Ireland for its willingness and interest in assuming the Chairmanship of our Organization in 2012 and would like today to express our full support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Austria welcomes the fact that next year Kazakhstan will be the first Central Asian participating State to assume the OSCE Chairmanship, marking a new era for the OSCE. In the European security dialogue we also rightly speak of security in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region as a whole.

It is true that we have high expectations of the new Chairmanship, but we are also willing to stand by our Kazakh partner. I wish Minister Kanat Saudabayev and his team every conceivable success in their future task.

Thank you for your attention.