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**STATEMENT BY DR. URSULA PLASSNIK,
FEDERAL MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA, AT THE THIRTEENTH MEETING
OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Ljubljana, 5 and 6 December 2005

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The anniversary year — the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 15th anniversary of the Charter of Paris — is rightly taking place against a background of reflection on the role of the OSCE at a time of far-reaching change. At the same time, we remember that the OSCE is built upon a stock of commitments that has proved its worth and is imperative for the strengthening of stability and democracy.

The OSCE can claim impressive achievements for 2005, too, as a result of tangible day-to-day work and the operational activities of the OSCE institutions, field missions and special representatives, though of course not always noticed by the general public and often completely underrated.

In these weeks we are also thinking about the tenth anniversary of Dayton. The OSCE is continuing to make its contribution to ensuring that, after relapses and despite tension, peace and democracy are to be found today in the Balkans. What is more, our Organization continues to serve as an unparalleled platform for dialogue between European States and the United States of America, Canada and the Russian Federation.

The “new challenges”, namely terrorism, organized crime and trafficking in human beings, require particular attention today. Through its ability to adapt and its versatility, the OSCE is eminently suited to employing its tools to tackle these dangers. Our Ministerial Conference has a few important decisions before it in this area.

The implementation of these projects also depends on progress in the reform process in which we are involved. This is not principally about management questions. It is also a matter of the credibility of the Organization and questions of confidence.

The path to reform is mapped out by the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons, which I fully support and which should facilitate consensus. To follow these recommendations means that we are to adhere to the agreed principles and political commitments and to the basic values of the OSCE. It means, as the Panel of Eminent Persons explicitly emphasized, that the OSCE institutions must retain their ability to provide

independent assessments in accordance with their mandates. This applies especially to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

That we strive towards maximum possible transparency in the decisions and operations of the OSCE and its institutions is also part of a successful reform. I am thinking here not only of the politico-military area, but also of the allocation of voluntary extra-budgetary contributions or the appointment of heads of field missions or election observation missions.

With the help of the ODIHR, a record number of expert meetings on the subject of democratic elections were held this year, including a meeting only ten days ago in Moscow. It was also possible to get a document on enhancing our commitments — “Copenhagen Plus” — essentially ready to be adopted as a decision. We greatly welcome the fact that for the first time the Russian Federation sent a large number of observers to the recent elections in Azerbaijan.

Let me say a few words about Austria’s attitude regarding its presidency of the European Union (EU) over the coming six months: our goal is to strengthen co-operation between the OSCE and the EU in such a way that both organizations are able to complement their efforts to ensure security and stability in the best possible way.

Stabilization in the Balkans is and remains a common priority of the OSCE and the EU. There are a number of important decisions to be taken there next year. They will pose a challenge to all of the organizations involved in this region. This applies particularly to Kosovo where the OSCE with its comprehensive field presence will have an important role in building up State institutions, in assisting with the return of refugees and in promoting reconciliation between the various ethnic groups. Particularly in these areas, the ongoing status process must be accompanied by substantial progress.

A further example of co-operation between the EU and the OSCE is in the area of small arms and light weapons, an area in which we, especially the OSCE, should implement specific projects.

The promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination is also a common concern of the EU and the OSCE. Increased co-operation between the OSCE and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) located in Vienna, which is to be developed into the EU Human Rights Agency, is therefore of great importance.

A subject which concerns us all and to which the OSCE can make a very important contribution is that of dialogue between civilizations. The conference “Islam in a Pluralistic World” recently held in Vienna imparted important impulses to this dialogue. A dialogue between civilizations at a high level is necessary but it is not enough. This dialogue must be anchored in real life and we must find better solutions to the problems of coexistence of persons with different religious, ethnic or social backgrounds. The OSCE has the appropriate tools to do this. As far as the situation of Roma and Sinti is concerned, we have been dealing with the necessary strategies for quite some time, but their implementation requires increased efforts.

I should like to say a word or two about the economy and the environment. So far it has not been possible to provide this dimension of the OSCE with additional dynamics. On

the basis of the preparatory work in which the Austrian chairmanship in the year 2000 was also actively involved, specific efforts should again be made in Central Asia and the southern Caucasus in this area. The subject of communications and transport security plays an important role for stability in these regions.

In conclusion, let me say that Austria values the presence of the OSCE in Vienna and will continue to endeavour to secure good working conditions for the Organization and its Secretary General. We should like to thank the Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, and his colleagues in Vienna and Ljubljana for their excellent work during the past year, and look forward to good co-operation with Karel de Gucht, the incoming Belgian Chairman.