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REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Statement

by

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Minister of Foreign Affairs**

**OSCE 12th Ministerial Council
Sofia, 6 – 7 December 2004**

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me first to congratulate the Republic of Bulgaria and personally the Chairman-in-Office, my distinguished colleague and friend Minister Solomon Passy, for the excellent job during the past year in leading our Organization. Also, thank you for the warm hospitality and excellent working conditions extended to us here in Sofia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Croatia fully aligns itself with the statement made by His Excellency Minister Bernard Bot of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union. Allow me just to point out just a few of Croatian considerations.

The OSCE has very significant tasks ahead, in order to continue improving the common space of co-operation, which includes all areas of security. The challenge of combating terrorist threats, in all their forms and manifestations, stands out above all. We believe that the package of decisions we are about to adopt or endorse at this meeting – particularly those aimed at strengthening the control of stockpiles of conventional ammunition, procedures on Small Arms and Light Weapons, as well as MANPADS export or brokering – are of highest importance. The decisions on reporting lost or stolen passports and enhancing container security as well on combating the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes will also be of particular significance for our joint efforts against terrorism.

We must also continue and strengthen our fight against another ill – that of international crime, which goes hand in hand with terrorism. Therefore, within the OSCE we have to redouble our efforts aimed at eliminating the illegal migrations and trade in drugs, arms, sensitive technologies and materials, cyber-crime etc. We have recognized human trafficking as a very serious violation of human rights and decided, by developing the OSCE Action Plan, to combat this form of slavery, affecting particularly women and children.

I would like to use this opportunity to assure all participating States of Croatia's readiness to actively contribute to the common fight against trafficking at all levels, especially through the Croatian National Committee established for this purpose.

Croatia feels a special responsibility for the stabilization and progress of Southeast Europe. As an EU and NATO candidate country, we will enhance our efforts, on individual, bilateral and regional level, aimed at transforming this former region of conflict into an area of good-neighborly relations. We are guided by the notion that all outstanding issues must be resolved through negotiations, with the help of the international community, and - if needed - by

resorting to international legal mechanisms. To achieve our common aims in this region, we are dedicated to the resolution of the issues of the missing and refugees, the full co-operation with the ICTY, promotion of democracy and its institutions, protection of human and minority rights, developing the civil society, the rule of law, border control and security, and especially European and Trans-Atlantic integration of regional states, based on their individual merits.

The OSCE role on the ground in many of these aspects has been helpful. I would like to express satisfaction with the actual partnership with the OSCE Mission in Croatia. The main items of the mandate are being resolved. Croatia now, as EU candidate, is looking forward to the fruitful co-operation towards its successful completion. I am also confident that we are ready to transfer the experiences gained in this co-operation to other areas where they could be helpful, be it within the activities of the OSCE or of the other institutions, such as the EU.

Next year we will mark the 30th Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 15th Anniversary of the Paris Charter. During these years the OSCE has proven that it has a unique role to bring member-states together in a forum of dialogue, confidence-building and co-operation on issues of our common interest. It has proven a vital instrument for Europe as a whole, especially in the times of historic profound changes that brought down old division lines of our continent. The values of democracy, the rights and freedoms of the individual and the other principles governing our Organization are the pillars for promoting stability and progress in the region we belong to. The progress we have made together should only inspire us to continue with determination on this road. In doing that, we have been constantly adapting our Organization, in order to better answer the challenges ahead and to improve its efficiency. In that respect, there is a number of proposals before us, opening the possibility of improvement of the functioning of the Organization and we hope it will bring good results.

In conclusion, I would like to express compliments to our Slovenian friends for their assuming the responsibility of chairing our Organization in 2005. I wish them every success in taking the OSCE forward, and - in doing that – I assure them of our full support and assistance in tackling all obstacles and challenges that may arise before our Organization.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.