

OSCE Ministerial Council, Helsinki, 4-5 December 2008

Statement on behalf of Ireland by Mr. Dick Roche, TD, Minister of State for European Affairs

Mr. Chairman,

May I begin by thanking Foreign Minister Stubb for the significant commitment which he brought over the past year to the challenging role of the OSCE Chairmanship and for the warmth of the hospitality that has been extended to us in Helsinki. Ireland aligns itself with the statement made by France on behalf of the European Union.

This has been a difficult year for our Organisation. Developments during the second half of 2008 have however underlined the continuing relevance of the OSCE in the prevention and resolution of conflict in all of its three dimensions. We must never forget that no dimension takes precedence over the others, and that the Organisation's unique spread of responsibilities, extending from the fight against terrorism to environmental security, is a seamless web. We also believe it is important that the commitments which we have voluntarily undertaken should be implemented. These are not merely aspirations, but are political commitments for which we as representatives of government have responsibility.

As part of the debate regarding the future of our Organisation, interesting and potentially most significant ideas have been put forward by Russia over recent months about revising existing security arrangements within the OSCE area. These ideas have been linked with the suggestion that it would be useful to hold an OSCE summit, perhaps as early as 2009. With regard to the first of these, we look forward to hearing fuller details about what is proposed. When the former Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, addressed the Permanent Council in Vienna in February 2008, he expressed the hope that the obstacles which had prevented the holding of a summit for nearly ten years could be removed. This remains our position. We would, however, expect that

any new institutions or arrangements that emerge from such a meeting would incorporate the existing OSCE *acquis*, across the three dimensions.

As Chair of the Human Dimension Committee during 2008, much of Ireland's activity in Vienna during the past year inevitably focussed on this dimension. Those elements which are central to the human dimension – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – provide the basis for stable, cohesive societies and thereby help foster good relations between states. Ireland particularly values the work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. In our view, observation of national elections by ODIHR, and its ability to assess whether those elections conform to internationally accepted standards, is an essential underpinning of democracy. We also greatly value the work which has been done by Anastasia Crickley as one of the three special representatives of the Chairman in Office, dealing with issues of tolerance and non-discrimination.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the decision to establish the office the Representative on the Freedom of the Media. During that period, the media have changed at an extraordinary pace and in ways that could not have been foreseen. But the need to vindicate freedom of expression and the role of the Representative will remain of vital importance. In October of this year, our Government had the pleasure of welcoming the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebaek, on his first visit to Ireland. We learned of the range of the High Commissioner's work and the role of quiet preventive diplomacy in tackling potential problems before they become a serious threat. I am happy to confirm that Ireland will continue its support for all three of these institutions, through the provision of substantial extra-budgetary resources.

We deeply regret that, in the South Ossetia region of Georgia, recourse was had to force in August 2008. Ireland supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. We also support the work of the European Union Monitoring Mission, to which we have contributed personnel, and the role of the European Union, OSCE and UN in relation to the Geneva peace process, which is central to achieving a settlement of the conflict. The OSCE is also making an important contribution through its

monitors, and we believe that they should be granted unimpeded access to their previous and well-established patrol areas in South Ossetia.

What happened in Georgia earlier this year violated a number of the key principles on which our Organisation is based and has cast a shadow over international relations. In addition, it has had a terrible human cost, both in terms of lives lost and civilians displaced from their homes, in some cases apparently on the grounds of ethnic origin. We would urge that remaining Internally Displaced Persons be allowed to return to their homes without delay. This would be an important step towards creating the trust that will make a wider settlement possible.

The long-running and unresolved disputes in Moldova and Nagorno Karabakh are a reproach to us all and deserve our full attention. I welcome the recent meetings at senior political level between Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and I hope there will be further progress within the framework of the Minsk Group. Where Kosovo is concerned, Ireland's position is one of support for full implementation within an independent and sovereign Kosovo of all obligations contained in the Ahtisaari plan. We wish to see the consolidation of a multi-ethnic, secure and democratic state, consistent with European Union values and standards and contributing to the stability of the region. As part of this process, it is important that EULEX should be able to deploy through the whole territory of Kosovo. The OSCE has a well established, and is making a real contribution in the areas of good governance, democratisation and human rights. We believe that the OSCE is making a real contribution in Kosovo and favour its continuation in 2009.

Mr. Chairman, the OSCE must continue its important roles in the areas of security, conflict prevention and resolution, democracy and human rights. I would like to congratulate you once again on a successful Chairmanship in challenging circumstances. I would also like to wish the very best to our Greek colleagues in the difficult task which they are taking on and to assure them of Ireland's full co-operation and support.