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Address by

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***Into the Swiss Chairmanship:
Seizing opportunities to create a security community for the benefit of everyone***

**Special Meeting of the
OSCE Permanent Council**

Vienna, 16 January 2014

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is an honour and pleasure to address the Permanent Council for the first time as Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE today.

Chairing this organization is a task of great responsibility that Switzerland takes up with determination, but also with much respect and humility.

Promoting stability in Europe and beyond is a foreign policy priority of Switzerland, which is why we attach great importance to our role as chair of this organization. But we are well aware that hard work will be necessary if we want the OSCE to advance and to deliver.

The Swiss Chairmanship will focus on incremental progress rather than any new grand designs. Our ambition is to reinforce positive dynamics in the OSCE that allow participating States to gradually increase their level of security and their mutual understanding. The OSCE provides opportunities for all of us. As Chairperson- in-Office, I call upon you to seize these opportunities.

We wish to extend our thanks to the outgoing Chairmanship, Ukraine, for the important work accomplished during the past year. Switzerland will do everything possible to take our common agenda further and enhance trust and cooperation in the OSCE in 2014.

The OSCE matters

Why is the OSCE relevant today? At the onset of the year 2014, it is timely to answer that question by looking back at the First World War that broke out a century ago.

The war between 1914 and 1918 was one of the deadliest conflicts in world history. More than 9 million combatants were killed. Many more were wounded. Countless civilians lost their lives too, including many children. The war rendered Europe a theatre of atrocities and suffering beyond imagination.

The First World War was a catastrophe for Europe that cannot be undone. But we should use the centenary of this war to draw lessons for our own time and make sure that our citizens can live in peace.

One lesson is that peace should never be taken for granted. We must not become complacent about peace but rather construct and secure it through constant dialogue, confidence-building, and collective efforts to boost mutual understanding.

Another lesson is that politics should not be the exclusive affair of a few, but should rather be accountable and express the security needs of the people. The fact that decisions taken by a small number of leaders led Europe to stumble into such a devastating war is one of the tragedies of the First World War.

The relevance of the OSCE lies in the fact that it takes heed of both these lessons, and it does so to an extent few other organizations do:

The OSCE constitutes a seminal multilateral format to discuss, build, and shape peace. It is a platform for dialogue that helps foster transparency and predictability, build trust, develop common norms, find non-violent solutions to conflicts, and shape common responses to common challenges.

The OSCE is also strong on the second lesson of the First World War. It pursues a comprehensive conception of security that goes beyond military and national perspectives. This multi-dimensional approach is a major asset.

The OSCE assists participating States in building multiple ties among each other. It is well positioned to address security issues that people are concerned about today, such as terrorism, cybercrime, and trafficking in drugs, arms, and human beings. And it promotes the well-being and safety of individuals and communities by helping participating States to build democratic institutions and ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. All this renders the OSCE a highly relevant organization.

The OSCE holds opportunities we should seize

Ladies and gentlemen

The OSCE not only matters. It also holds opportunities we all should seize. Compared to 1914, the risk of continental conflict is remote today. But we live in a world that is marked by rapid change, growing complexity, much unpredictability, and limited stability.

Overall, there has been remarkable progress towards peace and prosperity in the OSCE area in recent decades. Yet, major disparities between and within regions remain. The debt crisis has brought new hardship to some countries. We can also observe how the emerging multipolarity of the international order poses major challenges to effective multilateralism.

There are troubling signs of new rifts between East and West today. It would be easy to lament that such developments render life difficult for the OSCE. I see it the other way round: We are fortunate to have a tool at our disposal that can help us mitigate polarization by fostering dialogue and common action.

Unlike 100 years ago, the institutional infrastructure to advance security and cooperation is in place today. The very existence of this Permanent Council is evidence of that. The key question today is whether we have the political will to make full use of the OSCE's potential.

There are many opportunities that the OSCE provides. I will mention just three of them that the Swiss Chairmanship considers particularly important.

First, let us make the most of the OSCE's potential as a forum for dialogue. The Swiss Chairmanship encourages you to engage – to articulate your point of view, your grievances, your threat perceptions, and your ideas for solutions. We all should do so in a candid but constructive manner and refrain from simple finger pointing and sterile verbal disputes.

For dialogue to be meaningful, it is vital that we are also prepared to listen to what others have to say and to put ourselves in their shoes in order to understand their rationale. Taking into account other perspectives is a precondition for reinforcing trust and mutual understanding.

Second, the OSCE provides an opportunity by offering a common roof over the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regions. We should seek to make this roof watertight and redouble our efforts to translate our dialogue into more common substance.

During the Kiev Ministerial Council, I argued that the OSCE is our best safeguard against new divisions between East and West. I firmly believe that is true. But the OSCE can only play this role if all participating States allow it to.

Cooperative security à la OSCE does not stand in the way of sub-regional integration processes. It is the responsibility of all of us to make sure that these integration processes do not weaken the OSCE's efforts to build a pan-regional security community either. Such a security community will be to the benefit of all, including sub-regional entities.

The Swiss Chairmanship will work hard to facilitate dialogue in order to narrow the gaps and open new avenues for progress in the OSCE. Providing good offices and acting as an impartial bridge-builder is an intrinsic part of Swiss foreign policy. But such a role in the OSCE

can only bear fruit if all sides are willing to find solutions based on compromise. The quality of the OSCE as a roof depends on how much we are ready to invest.

Finally, the third opportunity I wish to mention concerns the OSCE's role as a field-based organization. Let us not just aim for dialogue and a common roof but also for common action on the ground. There have been more than 30 OSCE field operations so far. They offer participating States valuable support in implementing OSCE commitments.

The Swiss Chairmanship believes that the OSCE's comparative advantages on the ground are worth preserving and investing in. At the same time, it may well be that tomorrow's requirements in the field may not be identical with how things were done previously. It is certainly worth discussing how we can best make use of the OSCE's strengths in the field. I invite you all to join this debate.

Cooperation and compromise

Ladies and gentlemen

The OSCE matters. It holds opportunities for us. But it can only deliver if participating States are willing to cooperate and compromise.

As for the Swiss Chairmanship, we perceive our role as a real team effort. We are keen to work closely with all of you.

We will continue to coordinate closely with our Serbian colleagues. Our model of consecutive Chairmanships has already proven its merit.

The joint work plan and the agreement to reappoint Special Representatives will give the OSCE more planning certainty and provide us with more continuity to see things through. I can only hope that this model will be taken up by others.

We will also work closely with Ukraine – the other troika member –, with all other participating States, and with the OSCE Partners for Co-operation. Our spirit of cooperation will equally guide us in engaging with Secretary General Zannier and his staff, with the institutions, and with the field missions. Furthermore, we will seek a profitable exchange with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Effective cooperation is usually the result of a willingness by all sides to compromise. The message here is simple: If we want the OSCE to work effectively, we need to move beyond sticking to principled positions and focus on finding common ground.

Sovereign equality and decision-making by consensus are two valuable principles of the OSCE. But they can hamper the organization unless participating States apply a degree of pragmatism.

A current example where we rely on the support of all of you concerns the OSCE's budget for this year. I call upon all delegations to show flexibility and team-spirit in these negotiations to ensure the speedy resolution of the few remaining outstanding issues. We also count on you as far as the nomination of a new director of ODIHR is concerned.

Priorities of the Swiss Chairmanship

Ladies and Gentlemen

You may well be familiar with this tableau. In fact, I hope that you have all memorized it by now! It depicts the three objectives and the respective priorities of the Swiss Chairmanship. You could call it a pocket version of our strategy for 2014.

The Swiss Chairmanship seeks to make contributions towards “Creating a Security Community for the Benefit of Everyone.” Behind this motto stands our firm belief that the purpose of all politics should be to serve the people – in the case of the OSCE to serve the people of the 57 participating States. I will now provide you with some details about the priorities of our Chairmanship.

Fostering security and stability

Co-operation and reconciliation in the Western Balkans

Regarding our first objective of fostering security and stability, advancing regional cooperation in the Western Balkans will be a major priority of the Swiss Chairmanship. My Special Representative for the Western Balkans, Ambassador Stoudmann, has been tasked with facilitating such a process. We also count on the invaluable expertise of the OSCE field operations in this region. The 1600 employees of these operations represent a major asset for the OSCE.

2014 should be a year of reconciliation in the Western Balkans. The OSCE can play an important role here. It should also play a supporting role in the implementation of the Belgrade-Pristina agreement. The OSCE has facilitated local elections in northern Kosovo. We encourage the OSCE Mission in Kosovo to build on this. The OSCE is well placed to support the emerging Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo and help them work effectively with Kosovo institutions. It could also help establish an Association of Serbian municipalities in Kosovo, in close cooperation with the EU.

Dialogue and confidence-building in the South Caucasus

As for the protracted conflicts, it is the view of the Swiss Chairmanship that we all have a collective responsibility to contribute to their fair and sustainable settlement. We are well aware that progress may not come overnight, and that no settlement will be feasible unless the parties are committed to it. However, we firmly believe that it is not an option to simply wait and see in these conflicts. We will work hard to move forward, proceeding step by step.

In the South Caucasus, there have been some encouraging signs concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in recent weeks. High-level contacts have intensified since the meeting of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan on 19 November in Vienna. Incidents at the Line of Contact do, however, remain a matter of great concern. And we all are under no illusion that the road to peace remains long and winding.

The Swiss Chairmanship will support the efforts of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group through Ambassador Kasprzyk, my Personal Representative for this conflict. We will also encourage contacts between the civil societies of Armenia and Azerbaijan and between experts.

Regarding the conflict in Georgia, the Geneva International Discussions mark a unique platform which should be strengthened to lay the ground for a conflict settlement. Ambassador Gnädinger, my Special Representative for the South Caucasus, will co-chair the Geneva Discussions, together with the representatives of the EU and the UN.

We will encourage the participants of the Geneva Discussions to seek status-neutral solutions for a range of conflict-related problems. The Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism will remain a crucial element to stabilize the security situation on the ground. The Swiss Chairmanship is also ready to re-launch a discussion on the OSCE presence in Georgia, provided that the stakeholders show flexibility and creativity regarding the institutional setup of the OSCE presence.

There is also the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. After more than twenty years, it seems almost forgotten, and the resolve to look for a solution may be dwindling. But it is a fact that the people concerned continue to struggle with numerous obstacles in their daily lives. So let us not perpetuate frozen positions, but work towards a solution. I am grateful that Serbian Ambassador Bogojevic has accepted the assignment as my Special Representative for this process.

Modernization of the Vienna Document and exchange of ideas on conventional arms control

Ladies and gentlemen

You will agree that military stability, transparency and predictability cannot be taken for granted. This is why we believe that conventional arms control and confidence- and security-building regimes remain major instruments of security in the OSCE area. These instruments must, however, be constantly tailored to changing realities and needs.

The Swiss Chairmanship will continue to promote the modernization and updating of the Vienna Document, taking into account new military capabilities and technologies. We also want to support the role of the OSCE as an important market place for discussing ideas on the future of conventional arms control. We look forward to cooperating closely with the Chairs of the Forum for Security Cooperation – Malta, Moldova, and Monaco.

Strengthening security sector governance

Another priority of the Swiss Chairmanship concerns security sector governance. This is a field we seek to strengthen. Implementing the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security will be a focus area here. We are planning to hold a seminar for the 20th anniversary of the Code of Conduct in Vienna. We will also continue our efforts to make the Code of Conduct better known – in the OSCE area and beyond.

Improving people's lives

As for our second objective of improving people's lives, this is an area where it is particularly important that our common efforts produce tangible results for our citizens – for the citizens of all participating States.

Implementation of commitments in the Human Dimension

Within the human dimension of the OSCE, our focus will be on the implementation of existing commitments. We will seek to create an enabling environment for participating States and OSCE institutions to this end. We will support human dimension projects of these institutions and of field missions, strengthen monitoring tools, and increase cooperation with other organizations.

Furthermore, we plan to organize Chairmanship and human dimension events to review and improve the implementation of commitments. We will also seek to put the issue of torture and its prevention back on the agenda – it has been ten years since there was a substantial discussion on this.

There will be a conference against trafficking in human beings in mid-February. The goal is to discuss how legally binding standards, monitoring mechanisms, and political strategies can mutually reinforce each other and lead to effective action to counter trafficking in human beings. We will organize this conference jointly with the Austrian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

There will also be a Chairmanship event on human rights defenders. It will take place in Bern on 10 June. I look forward to welcoming all of you in our capital, 20 years after the declaration of Budapest!

More reliable management of natural disasters

As for the priority of more reliable management of natural disasters, many participating States know from their own experience that the scale, frequency, and severity of such events are increasing. This is why Switzerland believes that disaster risk reduction should be firmly embedded as a transversal theme in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We also believe that there should be a shift from disaster response to prevention. Effective risk management must happen well before a disaster strikes.

The OSCE can play an important role in this field. Natural hazard-triggered disasters and technological accidents can seriously affect the security of OSCE participating States. We will address this issue in the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

The Swiss Chairmanship aims at strengthening disaster resilience through knowledge transfer, regional cooperation, and enhanced political leadership. There will be field visits for participants during the second preparatory meeting in Switzerland to discuss in practice what risk mitigation can mean. Furthermore, Switzerland will offer support in building capacity for disaster risk management.

Combating transnational threats

Similarly to the case of natural disasters, prevention is also essential when it comes to the threat of terrorist attacks. Together with the OSCE's Transnational Threats Department and ODIHR, the Swiss Chairmanship will hold a conference on countering terrorism in Interlaken at the end April 2014. We will address this subject in a cross-dimensional manner. One important issue will be kidnapping for ransom. Switzerland believes that we can reduce the risk of kidnapping if countries adhere to the principle of paying no ransom. Other issues to discuss include human rights in countering terrorism and the return of foreign fighters.

Regarding other transnational threats, the Swiss Chairmanship will focus on implementation of the first set of confidence-building measures in the field of cyberspace. We are also committed to help implement the framework decisions concerning police-related activities, the border security and management concept, and the threat of illicit drugs. Planning is ongoing for a conference on illicit drugs in October.

Strengthening the OSCE's Capacity to Act

Further developing the OSCE ("Helsinki +40")

Concerning our third objective of strengthening the OSCE's capacity to act, the "Helsinki+40" process figures prominently on our agenda. "Helsinki+40" should define the OSCE's place in today's security architecture, focus the organization's activities and help to bridge political divides. The process in itself is an important confidence building measure. The challenge will be to translate visions and high-flying proposals into concrete deliverables. This is where your sense of purpose is called for.

The Chairmanship will be guided by the Helsinki+40 Roadmap that the Troika distributed in Kiev. We are grateful to the eight Ambassadors who will act as coordinators to shape the discussions. They will prepare a work plan for each chapter in order to structure the discussions. A first meeting of the Informal Helsinki+40 Working Group is planned for mid-February in order to inform you about their plans.

For the “Helsinki+40” process to succeed, we will need “game changers”. High-level political engagement is necessary. This is why I will seek to engage your ministers in discussions about the future of the OSCE, also in the Permanent Council.

Strengthening mediation capacities

It is in the spirit of “Helsinki+40” that we seek to strengthen the OSCE’s competence to act by building up its capacities to prevent violent conflicts and mediate lasting solutions. We have already started to provide mediation training to OSCE staff and will continue on this path. We would also like to strengthen ties between the OSCE and the UN mediation support unit. Moreover, we encourage participating States to make full use of the toolbox the OSCE provides to address the conflict cycle.

Enhanced involvement of civil society and in particular of young people

The Swiss Chairmanship attaches great importance to our final priority of enhancing involvement of civil society and in particular of young people.

We firmly believe that offering a platform for a dialogue with civil society on all three dimensions of the OSCE contributes to assisting OSCE institutions and participating States in implementing commitments. It also provides an opportunity for our governments to listen and respond to the needs of our citizens.

The Swiss Chairmanship will consult with civil society across the OSCE area and throughout the year. Four regional workshops will be organized in four different regions. The recommendations resulting from this process should feed into the final civil society conference that will be held in parallel to the Ministerial Council in Basel in December 2014.

If I am particularly attached to the idea of involving young people with the OSCE, this is because I regard it as a key task of politics to provide good prospects for the generations after us. Our project “Youth for Security and Cooperation in Europe” brings together 57 young people from all participating States. These people represent youth rather than any country. This is why we call them Youth Ambassadors.

These Youth Ambassadors will simulate a whole OSCE negotiation cycle. This will give them the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the OSCE – with its mechanics and its topics. But it will also give us – the governments – an opportunity to learn more about the needs and expectations of the younger generation.

Our Youth Ambassadors are going to negotiate a Youth Action Plan in the coming months, in which they formulate recommendations for the OSCE and its participating States. They will collectively present their Action Plan at the Ministerial Council in Basel. I think we should all look forward to hearing what they have to say – and what they expect from us, the OSCE.

It is my hope that the proposals of these young people will serve as an inspiration for the OSCE to work out its own Youth Action Plan. Serbia and Switzerland agreed to put down the objective of an OSCE Youth Action Plan in the joint work plan. The Swiss Chairmanship would like to thank our Serbian colleagues for the excellent cooperation on this youth project – as on many other projects.

Ladies and gentlemen

Before I conclude, I wish to briefly give the floor to three of these Youth Ambassadors. All Youth Ambassadors are currently conducting their negotiations next door, so I invited the three persons from the Troika countries to join us today.

Since the drafting of a Youth Action Plan has only just begun, our three guests cannot speak on behalf of all Youth Ambassadors at this stage. I have therefore asked them to briefly share their views on any issue that is important to them and tell us what they expect from an organization like the OSCE. Let me remind you that our three speakers represent youth rather than the country they come from.

[Youth Ambassadors Statements]

I would like to thank you on behalf of all of us for your statements. You see an important role for the OSCE in promoting education in fields such as human rights, mediation, and anti-discrimination. You expect a strong OSCE in preventing conflict, defending human rights, protecting minorities, and building bridges. And you hope for long-term involvement of youth in formats like the OSCE.

I want you to know that we take your points seriously. We wish you and your colleagues fruitful discussions and many productive ideas in your collective endeavour. I think that your audience in here will confirm that drafting and manoeuvring towards compromises can at times be tedious, but is often also very inspiring and rewarding – and can even be good fun.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me conclude by thanking everyone involved in the OSCE for working hard to advance security and cooperation among all participating States. It is an honour for Switzerland to chair this organization, and I hope that we can collectively seize some opportunities that will move us all forward this year.

There will no doubt be challenges and setbacks. It is also likely that not all debates in this Permanent Council will be entirely free of controversy. This is why we have brought with us a first aid kit that each of you will find on the table. The tools in this first aid kit include, among other things:

- a pocket lamp, to help develop a common OSCE vision
- a Swiss army knife, to help in the search for ingenious solutions that work,
- a sweet reminder, to recall the common norms and principles that tie us together in the OSCE,
- and a snap hook, to secure you when you venture into new territories to advance our goal of creating a security community for the benefit of everyone.