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Opening Remarks
12th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

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Madame Speaker of the Senate,
Mr. Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Mr. First Vice-Prime Minister,
Mr. Foreign Minister, Chairman in Office of the OSCE,
Mr. Secretary General of the OSCE,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to welcome the Members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to the Twelfth Annual Session in Rotterdam.

I would like to begin by extending the collective gratitude of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to the Dutch Parliament and to the historic and so vibrant city of Rotterdam for their courteous and warm hospitality in welcoming us in this beautiful country and in this fascinating city.

Rotterdam is a city that clearly reflects the history of our continent. A history of confrontation, war and devastation, but also a history of reconstruction and rebuilding. And a world class port which I visited yesterday. These important tasks could only have been accomplished by the will and the unity of the Dutch people. Rotterdam with much suffering rebuilt its broken heart and stands today as a model city open to the world, standing at the crossroads of all continents for trade and for culture. Today, when our efforts are precisely directed to overcoming the artificial division of Europe, a direct consequence of our past wars, we must learn from the experiences of this country and its citizens.

Dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased by the presence here today of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Foreign Minister Jan de Hoop SCHEFFER, and I am looking very much forward to his address to this Assembly. We very much welcome the Dutch Chairmanship of the Organisation and we look forward to co-operating with them in the months leading to the Maastricht Ministerial.

It is significant that for the first time an Annual Session of our Assembly takes place in the country that holds the Chairmanship of the Organisation. I sincerely congratulate the Netherlands for the significant work carried out in the past months in the difficult and challenging task of guiding the OSCE. I participated in the OSCE Ministerial Troika two days ago in The Hague. I was truly impressed by the energy and dedication that the Dutch have brought to their leadership of the OSCE.

Dear colleagues,

In this new Europe, and in this new world, the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly must stand ready to respond to new threats and challenges, and this means evolving and adapting to new realities.

I proposed that we should devote this Annual Session in Rotterdam to "*The Role of the OSCE in the New Architecture of Europe*", under which we can debate and make concrete proposals on the future role of the Organisation in light of NATO and EU enlargements and also significant international events. I believe that this is both timely and appropriate and it coincides with the main efforts of the Dutch Chairmanship during this year. I am sure the debates to follow in this Session based on the comprehensive reports and draft resolutions presented in the three general committees will contribute to the elaboration of comprehensive and productive reports on this important matter.

We will also consider some interesting indeed some controversial resolutions in the form of supplementary items. May I express the hope that the governments of the OSCE Participating States and the OSCE itself will pay due attention to our conclusions and recommendations.

Dear colleagues,

The OSCE must define its objectives in a changing Europe. The Prague Summit that decided to enlarge the Atlantic Alliance, the creation of the NATO – Russia Council, and the Copenhagen European Council, that also decided to enlarge the EU, have started a debate on the evolving role of security organisations in Europe. The enlargement of both the EU and NATO can not remain without significant consequences for other organisations. The OSCE must also reassert its place, and – most important – reassure its importance. The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, emphasizing human rights and economic

development as well as military security issues places it in a unique position in this new European security architecture.

In this context we must remember that the OSCE remains the most flexible and responsive Euro-Atlantic foreign policy instrument for non-military contingencies. It is the primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation in our region. The OSCE has the capacity to deal with both intra-state conflict and trans-national threats to stability. Its broad Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian composition and – again - its comprehensive approach to security are unique assets to the OSCE area. The OSCE has a co-operative approach to solving problems. Starting from the premise that security is indivisible, participating States have a common stake in the security of Europe and should therefore co-operate to prevent crises from happening and to reduce the risk of already existing crises becoming worse. The underlying assumption is that co-operation can bring benefits to all participating States, while insecurity in one State or region can affect the well-being of all. The key is to work together, achieving security together with others, not against them.

The OSCE, however, needs more visibility among our citizens. As parliamentarians we have a permanent contact with our citizens and we know that too few of our citizens know what the OSCE is or what the OSCE stands for, or what it is actually doing. And not only at the level of our citizens, but at a higher political level in our capitals, even parliaments, the OSCE does not seem to be given much attention – if any at all.

At the Porto Ministerial I proposed the idea of establishing OSCE information offices – similar to what the EU has established in its member and applicant countries – in all participating States of the OSCE with the double objective of increasing the visibility of our Organisation and reducing the apparent “stigma” attached by some member States hosting OSCE offices or missions. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, as a unique link between citizens and governments, can assist these potential information offices in making the general public aware both of the existence and of the importance of this organisation.

Distinguished colleagues,

Since we last met in Berlin last July the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has continued to be very actively engaged in a whole variety of activities aiming to fulfill the objectives of the OSCE. I will not outline here all our activities, but allow me to briefly reflect on some of our political priorities.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has taken upon itself the cooperation and coordination of activities with other international parliamentary institutions. In particular, we have close contacts with the Council of Europe Parliamentary

Assembly and the European Parliament. This co-operation concerns, for instance, election monitoring where it is essential that the International Community speak with one voice. We also have organized a number of Tri-Parliamentary Troikas to try to help in various crisis areas. As an example, our Assembly will hold the chairmanship of the Parliamentary Troika of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe next year.

The ad hoc committees of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly also continue to serve as an important tool in furthering the development of democracy and stability in the OSCE region. The activity of such groups has been impressive in the past months. The Seminar on Federalism held in Moldova organised by our Parliamentary Team was an important step towards enhancing dialogue in the country. The work carried out by the Parliamentary Group on Belarus and the Ad Hoc Committee on Abkhazia are also to be praised.

Our Ad hoc Committee on Transparency and Accountability has put forward constructive ideas for improvements in the efficiency and openness of the OSCE decision making processes.

The Parliamentary Assembly continues to give special importance to the relations between the OSCE and its Mediterranean and Asian Partners. The Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum held in Almaty in May clearly show our commitment. The Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum held in Kazakhstan last June – and that we hope to continue in a bi-annual basis - gave a priority place on our agenda to our Central Asian participants while also seeking to involve the Parliaments of the Asian Partners for co-operation in our work.

These conferences seek to bring regional issues and concerns – in this case those of the Eurasian and Mediterranean dimensions of the OSCE – to the attention of a greater number of parliamentarians throughout the OSCE area. The events and aftermath of 11 September 2001 have highlighted both the importance of security in Asia and in the Mediterranean to security in the OSCE area as a whole as well as the need for increased dialogue among OSCE member States and parliaments with our partners.

Regarding the Mediterranean, I led a delegation from our Assembly that met in Vienna, prior to our Winter Meeting, with the OSCE Contact Group with the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation in order to coordinate our activities and approaches. As a follow-up to that meeting I have called a meeting with our Partners tomorrow. I am also very proud to have received invitations by several Speakers of Parliament from the Mediterranean Partners. We hope to arrange for such visits in the months to come. Also, the creation of a Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum to meet every year in connection with the Autumn Conference is another new initiative. We look forward to the forum to be held in Rome next October.

Last, but not least, our Assembly continues to pay very special attention to the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE. The Third Sub-Regional Economic Conference devoted to the promotion of small and medium sized enterprises that took place in Bern, under the auspices of our Swiss colleagues, was an important success in bringing attention in the OSCE to specific issues of economic development.

Distinguished colleagues,

We also continue to strengthen co-operation between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and OSCE field missions by establishing contacts between parliamentarians and OSCE missions in the field. Delegations of parliamentarians have visited and had briefings at several OSCE missions.

The Parliamentary Assembly is convinced that the OSCE field missions are the most visible instruments of the OSCE in carrying out its mandate of preventive diplomacy, early warning, conflict management and post-conflict rehabilitation. They form the source of the OSCE's most significant comparative operative advantage in relation to other similar European and Euro-Atlantic organisations. Parliamentary delegations have visited since January the OSCE Mission to Croatia, the OSCE Presence in Albania, and the OSCE Spillover Mission to Skopje. We will continue this active programme in the Autumn with visits to other OSCE field missions in the Balkans and Central Asia.

Dear colleagues,

Since you entrusted me with the Presidency of this Parliamentary Assembly last year in Berlin I have tried my best to fulfil my mandate and perform my duties to the best of my knowledge. I have been very proud to represent this important parliamentary institution, and specially all of you, during the past year.

I take this opportunity to thank all Members of the Assembly for their support, specially the Members of the Bureau and the Officers of our Three Committees. My sincere recognition to all parliamentarians that have devoted their time and effort to attend our numerous conferences, meetings, field visits and election-monitoring project. Also, my gratitude to all parliaments that have hosted me in my capacity of President of the Assembly during this year in my extensive programme of visits. I also thank the Secretary General and all the staff of the Assembly's International Secretariat for their efficient work this past year to serve all of us.

I am putting my name forward for endorsement for a second term as President, allowing me to continue representing you until the 2004 Annual Session. I am convinced that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is a unique institution helping facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue and co-operation and providing a vital link between the governmental side of the OSCE and the directly-elected representatives of the citizens of the OSCE participating States.

In conclusion look around at an auditorium behind me probably displaying the flags of so many countries geographically spread over half of the world representing half a billion people with diverse populations, cultures and governments.

I look in front of me at the democratically elected MPs and deputies here in Rotterdam to uphold and further the goals of a great Organisation: the OSCE.

We have our collective task as parliamentarians. We must strive to achieve:

- Good governance;
- Earn prosperity for our constituencies;
- A proper balance between State and personal rights;
- And make our region more peaceful;

I hope, I know, our work over the next few days will proclaim the relevance of the OSCE and I hope help ensure it remains in the forefront of international organisations.

Thank you very much