



**Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Vienna, Friday 24 February 2012**

Address by Ms. Lucinda Creighton T.D., Minister of State for European Affairs

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here with you today and to have this opportunity to address the Winter Meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly. It is my firm belief that parliamentarians have a vital role to play in ensuring the effectiveness of the OSCE and the implementation of our commitments.

Ireland assumed the Chairmanship of the OSCE this year for the first time. This gives us a unique opportunity to make a tangible contribution to the promotion of European peace and security. The OSCE plays a significant role in conflict resolution and in the promotion of peace, security and respect for human rights and the rule of law. Its cooperative and inclusive nature is, I believe, its best asset. An important part of this cooperation is the work carried out by the Parliamentary Assembly, in particular the Assembly's role in facilitating inter-parliamentary dialogue across the OSCE region. On my own behalf, and on behalf of the Chairperson-in-Office (the Tánaiste, Mr Eamon Gilmore), I wish to emphasize the readiness of the Irish Chairmanship to work closely with the Parliamentary Assembly in order to further our common objectives.

I think you will all agree that the need for effective multilateralism is as compelling today as when the Helsinki Final Act was agreed all those decades ago. This need is all the more acute in view of the political and economic crises facing a great number of our States. As the fortieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act beckons in 2015, it would be timely to reflect on the contribution which the OSCE can make in tackling these global challenges and on how the Organisation can ensure its continuing effectiveness and relevance.

Mr. President,

I will now turn to some of the priorities of the Irish Chairmanship. In his address to the Permanent Council in January, the Chair-in-Office emphasized that Ireland would be pragmatic and fair-minded in its approach. Our aim is to elaborate a set of priorities that will ensure balance and coherence approach across all three dimensions. We will strive to achieve concrete results, through a small and balanced package of decisions and declarations for adoption at the Dublin Ministerial Council in December.

Ireland has always attached importance to the Human Dimension and we will be striving, in particular, to make progress in this field. The threat to fundamental freedoms and human rights in a number of OSCE participating States continues to be a cause of real concern. We will work closely with ODIHR, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to address specific instances where OSCE commitments are not being met and to take forward a number of key issues. The Parliamentary Assembly can play a significant role in this work, helping to ensure that all channels of communication remain open.

Our key priority in this Dimension will be internet freedom. Freedom of expression constitutes a basic building block for an open and free society. A free, uncensored and pluralist media is essential in any society to ensure freedom of expression. In little more than 20 years, the internet has been transformed from a tool largely used by academics into a vital platform, one that is central to our daily lives. Just as much as a conversation on the telephone or a private chat in a Viennese coffee house, communication on the internet falls clearly within the scope of the right to freedom of expression. The Irish Chairmanship plans to organise a conference in Dublin in June, at which we will aim to move towards a common understanding of the myriad issues raised by the internet and new media,

Human Dimension events are also planned on a range of other topics. We intend to organise meetings focussed on freedom of association and assembly, freedom of religion and belief, trafficking in human beings and racism and intolerance in sport. We will also oversee a review of Human Dimension events and will seek to ensure that the events remain relevant, inclusive of all stakeholders, and effective in evaluating the implementation of Human Dimension commitments.

Mr. President,

The Irish Chairmanship is deeply committed to the OSCE's election observation activities, which are fundamental to our work as a community of States committed to respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We will provide all necessary support to ODIHR and to the Parliamentary Assembly in this crucial area. We hope that States holding elections in 2012 will issue timely invitations to observe them, in accordance with their OSCE commitments. We will also work to ensure appropriate follow-up to recommendations made in election observation mission reports.

Central to the enhancement of security in the OSCE region will be the confidence and security-building measures adopted within the Politico-Military Dimension. I understand that there will be a special debate on the Future of Conventional Arms Control in the OSCE area later this afternoon. This debate is timely and I look forward to hearing the outcome of your discussions. As Chair, we will call on participating States to reflect on the building blocks available to us in the areas of confidence and security building measures, arms control, conflict prevention and resolution and trans-national threats. This will be the theme for the Annual Security Review Conference in June. We will also continue the good work carried out last year in updating the Vienna Document, despite some existing implementation problems, and will work on this with the three Chairs of the Forum for Security Cooperation during 2012.

We will take forward work on tackling transnational threats such as organised crime, cyber threats, illicit drugs, terrorism and trafficking, challenges which face all of our societies. In this regard, we welcome the establishment of the new Trans-National Threats directorate within the OSCE Secretariat, and are confident that this will help to strengthen coordination and coherence of OSCE efforts.

Mr. President,

The Economic and Environmental Dimension has a particular resonance today, given the global economic and environmental challenges with which we are all confronted. I know that, within your committee meeting yesterday, there was a special debate on the current economic and financial crisis in Europe. The financial crisis has demonstrated how poor

governance can lead to economic decline and how good governance must be the foundation for the road to recovery.

Our central theme for this year's Economic and Environmental Forum is the promotion of security and stability through good governance. There will be a particular focus on measures to counter corruption, money-laundering and terrorist financing. The first preparatory conference took place in Vienna earlier this month, entitled "Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism". The next will be held in Dublin in April and address "Promoting Good Governance and Combating Corruption in Support of Socio-Economic Development".

Conflict resolution remains at the core of the OSCE's mandate, a fact which was highlighted by the agreement of the conflict cycle Decision at Vilnius. We will take forward the implementation of this decision, which will assist the OSCE to deepen its involvement in all phases of the conflict cycle and to strengthen its capacity to tackle conflict, from prevention to resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation.

As Chair-in-Office, we will seek to make progress towards lasting settlements of a number of conflicts in the OSCE area. We have nominated two Special Representatives, Ambassador Pádraig Murphy and Ambassador Erwan Fouéré, to assist and advise us on these issues. They are cooperating with international actors on the ground as well as maintaining close contact with the parties. The Chairmanship will seek, in particular, to promote confidence building measures and to address humanitarian needs.

As regards Moldova and Transdniestria, we look forward to welcoming the participants in the "5+2" talks to Dublin next week. We stand ready to build on the momentum created following the successful resumption of official talks at the end of last year.

Ireland strongly supports the Geneva Discussions as the best forum for facilitating engagement and providing a way forward, in relation to the situation in Georgia. The first discussions under our Chairmanship will take place next month.

We also commend the continuing work of the Minsk Group co-Chairs in addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We look forward to working closely with the Co-Chairs and members of the Minsk Group throughout our Chairmanship.

Mr. President,

We in Ireland can empathise only too well with those who are engaged in seemingly intractable conflicts. In Northern Ireland, the courage of leaders on both sides to negotiate and make compromises in the interest of peace, backed by the perseverance of the Irish and British Governments and by international support, has resulted in a lasting settlement. While each conflict situation is different, I believe that sharing this experience can support and encourage efforts to resolve conflicts in the OSCE region. With this in mind, the Chairperson-in-Office will host a conference in Dublin on 27 April which will aim to draw on the experience of the Northern Ireland peace process as a case study. We will be joined at the Conference by the First and Deputy First Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive, by Senator George Mitchell of the United States and by His Excellency Martti Ahtisaari, former President of Finland, all of whom played crucial roles in the peace process.

Mr. President,

As I said at the beginning, the cooperative and inclusive nature of the OSCE means that it is uniquely positioned to play a significant role in building a comprehensive security community. A busy year lies in store for the OSCE and the Irish Chairmanship.

In addition to the priorities I have outlined, we will take forward the day-to-day work of the organisation, as well as specific taskings given to us by participating States.

I wish to welcome in particular the encouraging Ministerial Council Decision in Vilnius on Mongolia's application to become a participating State. The Chairmanship hopes to be able to welcome Mongolia as the 57th participating State by the time of the Dublin Ministerial Council.

Building on the Decision of the Vilnius Ministerial Council, we will work to enhance the OSCE's engagement with the Partners for Co-operation, together with the Lithuanian and Ukrainian Chairs of the Asian and Mediterranean Contact Groups. The security in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian area cannot be isolated from international events; we witnessed at first hand last year the dramatic events in North Africa as well as the natural disasters in Japan and

Thailand. The OSCE has acquired a considerable body of experience, expertise and best practices, which we are ready to share with our Partner countries. I know that the Parliamentary Assembly has been very active in reaching out to the Partner countries and I commend your activities in this regard.

We are also keen to move forward on issues related to the legal status of the OSCE and our aim is to equip the Organization with the legal protections and status that it requires to achieve its core objectives. To this end, we have commissioned Ambassador John Bernhard, the former Permanent Representative of Denmark to the OSCE, to take a fresh look at the issues related to the legal status.

I am confident that, through effective cooperation with all relevant actors, including of course the Parliamentary Assembly, we can achieve good progress during 2012.

Thank you for your attention.