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**STATEMENT BY MR. HANS WINKLER,  
STATE SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA, AT THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE  
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Madrid, 29 and 30 November 2007

Mr. Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be able to meet with you here in Madrid to discuss the central issues that will determine the work of the OSCE in the future. I should like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and your colleagues in Vienna and Madrid for their commitment and the successful work they have done for our Organization. Thank you also for the hospitality we have been shown here in Madrid. I should also like to take this opportunity to wish the future Finnish Chairmanship every success.

As a State in the middle of the European continent and of a region that was once characterized by instability, Austria has always attached great importance to the OSCE. We are convinced that the OSCE possesses strengths that other multilateral security organizations do not have: It has at its disposal a common basis of values. It is also the only security forum of this kind in Europe, a forum in which bilateral conflicts are discussed and 56 participating States can negotiate with one another as equals.

I believe that geographical balance in the distribution of tasks within the Organization is essential if we are to achieve our common goals. Every participating State that has subscribed to the principles and commitments of this Organization ought to also be able to assume the Chairmanship of the OSCE. At this Ministerial Council meeting, several countries are to be entrusted with the political leadership of the Organization. Last year, Austria spoke out in favour of entrusting this leading role to Kazakhstan on that basis because we are convinced that this task will have positive effects not only for the Central Asian region but also for the Organization.

I should like to thank the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), its Director and his team for their excellent work, in particular for the regular comprehensive and detailed reports on the implementation of its election-related recommendations in accordance with our decisions.

In his last report to the Permanent Council on 1 November, Director Strohal presented an impressive list of measures that should help to make the ODIHR's election observation

methodology more transparent, more geographically balanced, more linguistically inclusive and ultimately also more indisputable. We would ask the ODIHR and its Director to continue along this successful path.

Over the last few years, the ODIHR has developed a first-class method that has won international recognition and is being taken on by other international organizations as well. Austria is very receptive to new commitments, as contained in the draft proposal by the European Union for improving election-related commitments.

We regret that for the first time since 1990 it has been made impossible for the ODIHR — as the independent OSCE institution responsible for elections — to observe an election in a comprehensive manner. This is a deviation from standard practice and the well-established procedure for election monitoring. We expect that the ODIHR will be given the opportunity to exercise its role as an election monitor.

For many years now, the Balkans has been a priority for Austrian neighbourhood and foreign policy. Our contributions to the military and civilian missions in the countries of the West Balkans underscore this commitment. At the moment, public attention is focused particularly on the future of Kosovo.

Our goal remains the creation of a multi-ethnic Kosovo, in which all its residents can live in freedom and safety and have good prospects. It is for that reason that we must pay particular attention to the rights and the protection of the non-Albanian ethnic groups. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo has an important role to play here and should in any case — particularly in the interests of protecting the minorities living in Kosovo — be able to continue to this task. We therefore believe that its mandate should be extended until the end of 2008.

With regard to the “frozen conflicts” in the South Caucasus and Moldova, the OSCE continues to play an important mediation role. We encourage the parties concerned to use the negotiation opportunities available and to implement the agreements already reached. We welcome the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. The OSCE must step up the efforts towards conflict resolution and a normalization of the living conditions in these regions.

Mr. Chairman,

We should build on what we have already achieved and not call into question the acquis in the area of arms control and confidence- and security-building measures. It is precisely in a country in the centre of Europe that the memory of the arms race during the Cold War is a vivid and uncomfortable memory.

The OSCE has developed an impressive profile in the fight against terrorism, organized crime and trafficking in drugs and human beings, and with regard to the question of border security. It should continue to strengthen these activities in the area of non-military security. Furthermore, Europe has a fundamental interest in the development of and stability in Central Asia. We need Central Asia as a partner against drug trafficking, organized crime, illegal migration, Islamist infiltration and terrorism.

The Conference on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in Cordoba, in which I was also able to participate, demonstrated that there is no alternative to open and

honest dialogue if we are to find solutions to the problems confronting modern societies. It also demonstrated that it is precisely the OSCE that offers a special platform not only to lead in the fight against intolerance, discrimination, racism and radical extremism but also to put the insights gained in the process into practice.

Austria welcomes the Spanish initiative to give appropriate attention within the OSCE to the important area of environmental security. In this connection, we also support the special focus on water management, an area in which Austria can draw on many years of experience through co-operation in the Danube area.

Mr. Chairman,

Austria is convinced that the OSCE, with its many years of experience in conflict management and, above all, conflict prevention has achieved a great deal and can and should make a considerable contribution in the future. I therefore also hope that this Ministerial Council meeting will succeed in formally adopting the Convention on the International Legal Personality, Legal Capacity, Privileges and Immunities of the OSCE because it will further improve the work of the Organization in the future. Austria is one of the OSCE's special friends and will remain one in the future as well. That is why we have made a prestigious headquarters building available to it this year. Once again, I should like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty, Juan Carlos I, who honoured the opening of the new OSCE headquarters in Vienna with his presence.

Thank you for your attention.