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**STATEMENT BY MR. SERGEY LAVROV,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF
THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Athens, 1 December 2009

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Distinguished colleagues,

This is our second OSCE meeting in less than six months, and again we are meeting in Greece. As you might recall, our predecessors had two OSCE meetings in one year on only two occasions – in 1991 and 1992, when Europe was going through a period of change.

And this is symbolic. Evidently, it is again time for Europe to change.

We need to take decisive steps to overcome the dividing lines that persist in the Euro-Atlantic region and to form genuinely common spaces in various areas. In other words, we must finally implement the project of a united Greater Europe, which seemed so achievable immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall 20 years ago. The failure to do so up to now can only be blamed on the continued existence of prejudices and the inertia in thought and politics, a situation in which, as Alexander Pushkin put it, habit is a substitute for happiness.

Today, I should like to draw attention to the politico-military dimension. Objectively, it provides the basis for everything else. However, our co-operation in that area has begun to seriously lag behind our interaction in the other dimensions of security. It is precisely here that the legacy of the past is most evident.

In June of last year, the President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev proposed in Berlin that we should draw up a Treaty on European Security, which would help to resolve this problem within a framework of “rules of the game” and mechanisms for their application. This initiative, which is concerned with “hard” security, has a unifying character and is designed to harness the potential of States and international organizations to create a truly indivisible space of equal security for all the States of the Euro-Atlantic region. We are grateful to Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for their firm support of this initiative in the joint statement with Russia on 18 November of this year.

We should also like to express our gratitude to all the other countries, political analysts and experts who played an active part in the numerous discussions held on the Russian initiative last year in various intergovernmental and non-governmental forums.

On the basis of the results of those discussions, we have prepared a draft Treaty on European Security, which was passed on by President Medvedev to the leaders of the Euro-Atlantic States and the executive heads of the relevant organizations operating in the region. We trust that once they have studied the draft, our partners will provide us with feedback on the substance of the proposed Treaty.

The need for radical changes in the politico-military sphere is also evident in relations between Russia and the United States of America. Our countries are actively working on a new treaty on strategic arms reduction, which will provide for unprecedented cuts in strategic weapons and should reflect the new qualitative level of mutual confidence.

The OSCE is also aware that changes are long overdue.

We pay tribute to the political vision and far-sightedness shown by the Greek Chairmanship in launching the Corfu discussions. The most important result of these discussions to date is that they have revealed a general dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the Euro-Atlantic region, a dissatisfaction that can no longer be masked by convenient and time-tested formulas glorifying the OSCE's "achievements". Needless to say, efforts and commitment will be required to translate this new awareness into concrete action. For us, the journey is only just beginning. It hardly makes any sense to try to predetermine the final outcome of the Corfu Process or to formalize its structure and subject matter. The Corfu Process is a valuable means of generating an open-minded approach to things. We trust that tomorrow we shall approve a declaration on the Corfu Process and that the continuation of open discussions will enable us to breathe fresh life into the work of the OSCE's permanent bodies, to devise ways for generally improving the Organization's effectiveness and competence, to eliminate serious distortions in the application of a comprehensive approach and to make it balanced. We are convinced that the challenge of finalizing the institutional structure of the OSCE, beginning with the adoption of a charter, is entirely in keeping with the logic of the Corfu Process.

The Ministerial Council has before it a number of important initiatives co-authored by Russia. We attach special importance to the adoption of a ministerial declaration on the 65th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. We need to remember the lessons learned from that tragedy and must not allow any deviation from the principles of the post-war global and European structure, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act.

We also believe it necessary to begin the process of updating the Vienna Document of the Negotiations on Confidence-and Security-Building Measures, which was originally conceived as a "living" instrument but has not been updated since 1999. We have proposed that there should be an in-depth review of all the other politico-military tools available to the OSCE with a view to determining their relevance to the current realities and that a new programme of action should be drawn up in the area of confidence-building measures and arms control. This also applies completely to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty). We regret that little has been done in the last two years to find a way out of the crisis. We are still awaiting a response to our proposals of 5 May of this year

regarding further steps on the basis of the draft “package solution” drawn up by Russia and the United States. Once again, we urge our partners to begin intensive work to restore the viability of the CFE Treaty using all available means, including the Joint Consultative Group in Vienna.

In addition to the creation of a strong network of politico-military reference points, decisive steps are needed in the area of conflict prevention and resolution. Russia is proposing that we should begin by agreeing within the OSCE on common principles of crisis resolution to be observed by all countries and international organizations operating in the Euro-Atlantic region. It is only on this basis that we shall be able to exclude scenarios involving the use of force, like the one ventured by Tbilisi in August of last year, from the set of acceptable options.

The OSCE must be more resolute in pooling efforts to combat transnational threats and challenges, including terrorism and organized crime. Russia and the United States have co-authored a draft Ministerial Council decision on this subject.

Illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs represents a growing threat to the security of individuals, society and the State. Annual reports by the United Nations cite ever more depressing statistics on the scale of the production of Afghan opiates. In accordance with a decision adopted at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Madrid, our Organization is called upon to make its contribution to assisting our Afghan partners through the implementation of projects to strengthen the borders of Central Asian countries with Afghanistan, for example, or to train Afghan narcotics police at educational facilities in OSCE countries, including Russia. I should particularly like to mention the task of stopping shipments of precursors, a considerable portion of which reach Afghanistan from Europe. We also need to take decisive measures to combat the synthetic drugs that are manufactured and used in the OSCE region.

Russia is in favour of developing the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE’s activities. The Organization can find its niche here if its plans are commensurate with the possibilities that exist in reality and do not duplicate the work of specialized institutions. In other words, we should be guided by concrete results that offer added value even if it is modest. In this regard, we welcome the outcome of the recent OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum on the subject of migration. We also support the transport theme proposed by Kazakhstan for next year’s meeting of the Forum.

The human dimension is an integral part of the security concept. Russia believes that the security of the individual should always be the focus of the OSCE’s attention. We are, however, against this dimension of the OSCE being developed as if in a vacuum, without taking into account the activities of other international organizations. All the OSCE countries are members of the United Nations and its Human Rights Council, and the absolute majority of the OSCE participating States are members of the Council of Europe, where a manifold system of instruments of international law exists with clear mechanisms and agreed rules for control and accountability. The OSCE should not attempt to replace “each and everything” but should rather provide assistance to States in those areas where they actually need it and are requesting help. This is how the OSCE institutions should develop their work in accordance with previously adopted decisions on the human dimension.

There is another important point: a selective approach to those decisions cannot be permitted. The Charter of Paris for a New Europe, whose 20th anniversary we will celebrate next year, proclaims freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of movement. While the OSCE actively works on and monitors the first three freedoms, the commitments with respect to freedom of movement and the facilitation of visa regimes are not being met. I might recall that these commitments are set out in the Helsinki Final Act (1975), the Vienna Document (1989), the Copenhagen Document (1990), the Charter of Paris (1990), the Budapest Document (1994) and the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept (2005). Unfortunately, some countries are not only failing to facilitate visa procedures but are even tightening them. And visa charges sometimes exceed the average monthly salary in a number of OSCE countries.

A visa-free regime is precisely what is needed to ensure irreversible progress towards a Greater Europe, where citizens from all our countries will feel that they are Europeans.

Russia together with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has put forward a draft Ministerial Council decision on freedom of movement. We are proposing that the dialogue on this subject should be revived and that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) should be instructed to monitor the visa situation in OSCE countries.

Lastly, it is important that human rights discussions take into account the fact that these rights are based on traditional human values and cultural and civilizational diversity, diversity which must of course be respected.

Next year will be a notable year for the OSCE. It will have several anniversaries. The Second World War ended 65 years ago. More than half of its victims – 27 million people – were citizens of the Soviet Union. Nuclear weapons were also used for the first – and I hope the last – time 65 years ago. The CSCE Helsinki Final Act was signed 35 years ago and it is 20 years since the adoption of Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

We wish Kazakhstan every success in chairing the OSCE in 2010. We are ready to contribute to the productive work of our Organization in the coming period, and we support Astana's initiative to convene a summit meeting.

In conclusion, I should like once again to thank the Greek Chairmanship for its hospitality in hosting two OSCE ministerial meetings and for the Corfu Process initiative, which we regard as very promising.