

**Statement by Mr. Normans Penke, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia at the OSCE Ministerial Council, 6-7 December 2004, Sofia**

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express our thanks to the Bulgarian Government for organizing the 12th OSCE Ministerial Council meeting. Let me also state that we appreciate the hard work the Bulgarian Government has invested in the OSCE Chairmanship this year.

Mr. Chairman,

Since September 11 the security environment and our perception of threats have fundamentally changed. Unfortunately, this year demonstrated once again that the world is not secure from the scourge of terrorism. Victims in Spain, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Russian Federation and elsewhere bear witness to this fact. Effective fight against terrorism requires our common coherent action and strong will. The OSCE should adopt itself to the changes in European and global security to further enhance the organization's counter-terrorism efforts. A package of practical decisions which will be adopted at this Ministerial, is an important step in this regard.

This spring was of historic importance for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Latvia along with a number of other countries in the region joined the EU and NATO. The reunification of Europe has ensured that the number of countries respecting democratic values and human rights is increasing. But I am also sure, that next year, when the OSCE will mark the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, some people will still be eager to see these values to be present in their communication with their respective authorities. Our task is to ensure that their hopes are met.

Mr. Chairman,

We were concerned over the deterioration in the process of achieving a settlement in the Republic of Moldova triggered by the actions taken by self - proclaimed Tiraspol regime to close Latin script schools in July this year. We condemned these provocative steps as a serious violation of basic human rights. Latvia welcomes the OSCE efforts to reach a political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the Republic of Moldova based on the full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. We believe that the negotiations on political settlement should be constructive, transparent and compatible with the OSCE efforts.

The long-term settlement is also dependant on the completion of the withdrawal of Russian troops and armaments from Moldova. It is five years since the OSCE Istanbul Summit, at which the Russian Federation committed itself to withdraw its forces from Moldavian territory. We are disappointed over the lack of progress with regard to the fulfillment of these commitments. We call upon the Russian Federation to fulfill their

Istanbul commitments and complete the withdrawal of Russian forces from Moldova and Georgia.

Mr. Chairman,

Latvia has closely followed both rounds of presidential elections in Ukraine. Unfortunately, the elections did not meet a number of international standards which led to a serious crisis in the country. We welcome the reaffirmation not to use violence and to settle this political crisis by legal means. We welcome the decision of the Supreme Court in Kiev and Round table meetings, which opened the way for a repeat of the second round of the election that, we hope, will fully reflect the will of the Ukrainian people. Latvia will support the important role of the OSCE in this process. We support the right of Ukrainian people to choose their president in a democratic way and the courage and the will of people to bring about democratic changes in their country. Maintaining the territorial integrity of Ukraine is crucial.

Latvia as a neighboring country is closely following the political situation in Belarus and is concerned that the leadership of Belarus is continuing to ignore the basic values of a democratic society. We remain deeply worried about the situation of the civil society, independent media and the NGOs that are the basic elements of democracy. The absence of these elements was clearly visible during the parliamentary elections in Belarus. Latvian election observers were among those, who closely followed the course of the elections. We have to admit that the authorities of Belarus did not use another opportunity to join the democratic world by conducting elections based on principles of democracy.

Mr. Chairman,

The OSCE plays an important role in combating trafficking in human beings. Important documents adopted at Porto and Maastricht Ministerials including OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings reaffirmed OSCE countries commitments to fight this crime, which seriously undermines the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom. It is a problem for the whole OSCE region – every country can be considered as a country of origin, transit or destination. Therefore, we welcome the establishment of the OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

The issue of anti-Semitism deserves our attention everywhere in the OSCE region. Unfortunately, we note with concern that the scourge of anti-Semitism has not diminished. During this year, many OSCE member states witnessed attacks on Jewish communities. The conference on anti-Semitism in Berlin was a success and we welcome the appointment of three Personal Representatives to identify ways to combat all forms of intolerance including anti-Semitism.

This summer Latvian Government adopted a National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance and allocated funds to begin its immediate implementation. This programme is meant to address various forms of intolerance, including anti-Semitism. The programme includes activities in education, public awareness raising, research and monitoring, work with NGO-s, media as well as strengthening Latvia's anti-

discrimination legislation. Latvia has also become more active in Holocaust education and research. A number of projects related to Holocaust education and support for the Jewish community in Latvia have been implemented recently.

Mr. Chairman,

We support the ongoing efforts to reform the OSCE, which we consider to be a multi-year engagement with the purpose of enhancing the capacity of the organisation to address the challenges of the twenty-first century and to strengthen its effectiveness. The thirtieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the fifteenth anniversary of the Charter of Paris for New Europe and the tenth anniversary of the OSCE, provide with unique opportunity to reflect on the role of the organization.

Thank you.