

STATEMENT BY
FOREIGN MINISTER VARTAN OSKANIAN
AT THE 14TH OSCE MINISTERIAL
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ENGLISH only

Mr. Chairman,

The agenda before this 14th Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the OSCE has far-reaching implications. In some cases, it extends and deepens our past commitments. In others, it expands the scope of our overall pre-occupations with security, and its complex, multidimensional components.

The decisions we are about to adopt on the exploitation of children, hate crimes, human trafficking, trafficking in small arms and illegal weapons are extensions of existing domains. The important decisions on organized crime, transportation and energy security are clearly additional directions, claiming distinct attention.

It has been an arduous process addressing the issues that the Ljubljana Ministerial tasked us with. Regrettably, the search for a middle ground has inevitably led to the weakening of some modest but substantive proposals, inspired by the Eminent Persons' approach. Mr. Chairman, the Belgian Chairmanship under your guidance, succeeded to keep up the momentum, look for solutions, cajole, pressure and produce this package of decisions to enhance the effectiveness of our organization.

Allow me to point to what I wish were also included. I wish, for example, that the role of host countries, their prerogatives and interests were more fully reflected in the decision regarding the enhancement of the effectiveness of the OSCE's Secretariat, the institutions and the field missions. After all, the ultimate benefit of the field office in Yerevan, and elsewhere, is in their efforts to make themselves redundant.

Additionally, regarding the utility of ODIHR's work. As effective as ODIHR's priorities and practices are, it would be misleading to conclude that it can no longer adapt, be improved or become more responsive and transparent. Its operational autonomy should not insulate it entirely from the judgment and appreciation of participating states.

This 'reform' process has been trying to find its way toward a satisfactory conclusion for more than 5 years. Today, the participating states face a crucial dilemma -- terminate the process because it is incomplete, or continue work on at least some elements, hoping the next round will be more fruitful. Armenia is clearly inclined towards this second choice. Otherwise, we will expose our inability to achieve convergence about the means of getting our own house in order before we keep expanding our agenda to cope with the world's ills.

Mr. Chairman, in Armenia, we understand the importance of getting one's own house in order, in order to successfully navigate the myriad regional and global challenges. Thus, we have focused on strengthening our economy and consolidating our democratic reforms. We continue to register double digit growth, we remain highest in the region on the UN's Human Development Index. To empower the residents of rural Armenia and enable the sustainability and viability of Armenia's villages, we have embarked, together with the Diaspora and with public and private partners, on a rural poverty eradication program, because this segment of our population has benefited only modestly from Armenia's overall economic growth.

In addition, we have taken on additional political reform commitments, especially in the run-up to two important election years. I believe we must also take special steps to engage our public in setting the agenda for these elections, and through them for the next decade of stabilization and prosperity. A public that believes in its role in the development of our society will be a public that is ready to take ownership of the election process and its outcomes. We will invite ODIHR to observe the process and we hope to meet the standards and expectations of a watching world.

Mr. Chairman,

We know that the world is watching our region for other reasons as well. No one wants a lasting settlement to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict more than we do. The last meeting between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan gives us hope that agreement may yet be found even on those principles around which we still don't see eye to eye. We know that a lasting solution will depend on the security and status of the people of Nagorno Karabakh. That is how this conflict began – when their security was violated, and their right to self-determination trampled over. The principles under discussion seek to satisfy the right of the people of Nagorno Karabakh to self-

determination while at the same time eliminating the consequences of the conflict. We anticipate that indeed Azerbaijan will find the will to acknowledge and respect the right of the people of Nagorno Karabakh to determine its own future, its own status, its own security arrangements.

In just a few days, Nagorno Karabakh will hold a referendum to adopt a Constitution. During this decade and a half, they have built political institutions, through elections they have selected their own authorities and developed a legislative framework. They recognized the need for a basic law, and recognized that a referendum is the only acceptable way to collectively adopt that basic law. For the international community to dismiss their democratic aspirations and blame them for choosing to behave democratically is counterproductive. Azerbaijan claims that exercising a vote is an obstruction to the peace process. It can't be further from the truth. What really obstructs the process is their overreaction to Karabakh's democratic activities, their refusal to engage Nagorno Karabakh in peace talks, their repeated militaristic calls and their persistent efforts to sidetrack the Minsk Group negotiations process.

Finally Mr. Chairman, we wish the Spanish Chairmanship well.