

**Remarks of President Petros Efthymiou
to the Permanent Council of the OSCE
3 November 2011 – Vienna**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Permanent Council,

It is a pleasure to be with you today.

At a time when the economic crisis forces our governments to further cut funding, reduce foreign affairs expenses and focus heavily on domestic issues, it is all the more important that we work harder to epitomize the OSCE achievements and its comprehensive approach to security and prosperity.

I come here today as the elected representative of 320 parliamentarians from across the OSCE region. We are pleased to note that this Organization is working to fulfill the mandate of the 2010 Astana Summit Declaration, which called for intensifying OSCE co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly.

By now you have all received the recommendations approved by our parliamentarians at our Annual Session in Belgrade, and our representative in Vienna, Ambassador Nothelle has briefed you on the details. As we always urge participating States to provide feedback on our Declaration, I look forward to hearing your views today. If you do not have the chance to comment now, I would like to reassure you that our Vienna Liaison Office has an open door for dialogue.

The Declaration and its accompanying resolutions cover all three dimensions, and I have been informed that you are working on a number of draft Ministerial Decisions related to our recommendations. We expect that the provisions of our Belgrade Declaration will be duly reflected and referred to in the texts for Vilnius.

Amid challenges to human rights and democracy throughout our region, we are convinced that our recommendations will facilitate the OSCE to seize the opportunity both to change itself and bring change in its area. By supporting fledgling democracies throughout our region, we can empower people to make lasting changes in their own countries. By strengthening our field operations and being more flexible during crises, we can prove we are not just the world's largest regional security organization, but an effective one.

Our parliamentary contribution is to bring additional visibility and credibility to the Organization. Most of the people who took to the streets in Tunis and Cairo and Benghazi in the past nine months have never heard of the OSCE. We know their story. We must tell them ours.

To accomplish all these targets, we need true leadership from the top – the Chair-in-Office. Lithuania deserves credit for its work this year, and now as Ireland is preparing to receive the torch, we must redouble our efforts to strengthen the role of the Organization's political leadership. The direct involvement of the Chair sets the tone for engagement from all the other foreign ministers. Next week

I will go to Dublin to visit the incoming Chair-in-Office, Foreign Minister Gilmore. I look forward to Ireland's strong leadership in all three dimensions of the OSCE.

Our field presences are already successful, but our Belgrade Declaration calls for the Ministerial Council to consider creating rapid reaction missions for the OSCE to use in all types of emergencies. We have seen Draft Ministerial Council Decision on enhancing the OSCE's capacities regarding the conflict cycle, which the Lithuanian Chairmanship recently circulated. The Action Plan considered at the 2010 Astana Summit contained important references to the contribution that the PA and MPs can make during all phases of the conflict cycle, as it had been amply discussed during the Corfu Process and in the follow-up to Astana. We, the PA leadership and all our members, stand ready to lend our expertise from decades of parliamentary networking to your efforts.

The excellent discussions we had with the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group and the CiO's Special Representative on the Conflict dealt by it, last month in Dubrovnik, – coupled with our work in Moldova – are indicative of our commitment to strengthen the OSCE's work on conflict resolution. Governments conclude accords for peaceful solutions to conflicts, but it is parliamentarians who build the public support for these solutions, foster understanding about diplomatic processes, and raise public awareness about OSCE work toward lasting peace.

The Parliamentary Assembly regularly works in this direction – adding a credible voice to the OSCE in all of our participating States through the media, through debates in parliaments and through our delegations' active involvement in promoting OSCE commitments in all three dimensions.

With this in mind, at our Belgrade Annual Session, we also voted for the OSCE to increase parliamentary dialogue in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, through the OSCE Centre in Bishkek. And we have backed up this commitment with action all year long. Three times this year we have sent parliamentarians to Bishkek and Osh. These delegations, comprising members from Croatia, Greece, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Ukraine, in cooperation with Kyrgyz parliamentarians and the OSCE office, have ensured that they made a substantial contribution towards strengthening the role of parliament in this important Central Asian country. These ongoing meetings as well as the Kyrgyz parliamentarians' active participation at our conferences this year are a symbol of the OSCE at its best. All of our parliaments become stronger through this sort of knowledge-sharing.

With appointments from the Chair-in-Office to lead the OSCE short-term observer missions based in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia this year, the Assembly has seen mixed levels of co-operation between our Institution and the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. We continue to believe that cooperation will be successful if it fully respects the 1997 Cooperation Agreement. As the CiO's appointee to lead the short term OSCE election observation mission in the incoming Russian Duma elections, I look forward to an improved co-operation.

While observing the recent elections in Tunisia, the parliamentarians also helped extending the OSCE's brand to the Partners. This mission and its ensuing press coverage helped solidifying our Organization's place in this time of historic change. In this regard, I encourage you to work towards building consensus to engage the OSCE's executive structures in strengthening democracy in our Partner countries, in close co-operation with the transitional authorities and upon their request.

These election observation missions promote parliamentary dialogue. These visits have also an added value for the OSCE itself. Thanks to the strong co-operation with OSCE field operations, MPs, having witnessed the OSCE in action and with a firsthand experience of the professionalism of the staff, they return home committed to make the case for investing in the OSCE and its backbone – the field presences. I would like to reassure you that you are not alone in your commitment to provide support to all our field operations. The Parliamentary Assembly will always be an advocate and a partner for this cause.

It is critical for the success of our Organization that the budget continues to strongly support the work being done in the field. Today, I also repeat our calls for this body to find the political will needed to re-open OSCE offices in Belarus and Georgia. We are also committed to parliamentary dialogue so as to help Belarus upholding its OSCE commitments.

We should also deepen the co-operation between the PC's and PA's three committees and make joint meetings a regular procedure. In this vein, I am happy to note that Matteo Mecacci, the Chair of our Third Committee, will brief the participating States on his committee's work in the human dimension on 14 November.

Our Assembly voted again this year – as we have done so many times in the past – for greater transparency and accountability from the OSCE. We seek to review the governmental side's actions because we, the peoples' representatives, demand accountability. The OSCE is no different. Let me point out that, when the Charter of Paris called, in 1990, for establishing a Parliamentary Assembly as an OSCE Institution, the then foreign ministers intended to create a body that would ensure closer ties between the OSCE and the peoples we represent. Twenty years later our citizens are increasingly wary of funding international organizations that function without the same democratic accountability they have come to expect from their own national governments.

That is why we have proposed a series of solutions to make the OSCE more effective and increase its democratic legitimacy.

In Belgrade, we voted to call for the Permanent Council meetings to be made open to public and press on an ad hoc basis. For other international organizations, partners, or just participating States to know that we are the main organization promoting comprehensive and indivisible security, we need to be better known. And we cannot reach out if our regular, diplomatic meetings are taking place behind closed doors, as is the perception now.

This year, our Parliamentarians also passed a resolution that calls on this body to modify the consensus rule for personnel, budget and administration matters. Finally, we voted that this body should use the consensus-minus-one rule for “clear, gross and uncorrected violations of OSCE commitments.” Furthermore, if meetings were open to the public, the country blocking consensus would have to do so in the face of public scrutiny.

We still face a situation which is characterized by many stalemates, not only related to the frozen conflicts. I will only mention the CFE-Treaty as an issue, which – although strictly speaking a matter of the signatories to this treaty – has had a long-term paralyzing effect. Our worst common enemy is

routine, and often enough our routine proceedings suffocate us and limit our ability to come up with visions for the future.

If we talk of the future, the 2nd dimension will most probably keep us increasingly busy. Being in the eye of the storm, I can personally testify how closely economic issues are linked to fundamental issues of democracy and stability.

Let me conclude by repeating what I have said before: I remain convinced that the OSCE is important, not just because of the glory of the past, but because having an organization which links Europe with Asia and North America using the working methods of the OSCE, is a necessity for the present and the future. Let us all contribute to and help that it gets the necessary upgrade in our capitals.

Thank you.