



**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, AND FOREIGN MINISTER
OF THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC, AND OSCE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE
H.E. MR. GEORGE PAPANDREOU
TO THE OPENING SESSION OF THE
17TH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE OSCE**

Dear Ministers,
Heads of Delegation,
Secretary General,
Directors of OSCE Institutions,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure as Chairman-in-Office to welcome you all to the 17th Ministerial Council of the OSCE. I am pleased that so many Ministers of Foreign Affairs have come to Athens, and believe there could be no more appropriate place to reinvigorate an Organization that has done so much to strengthen democratic governance across our region. I know that you have travelled here sharing our common conviction, that we can achieve great things over the next two days. I hope that we can all return home having done our utmost to advance the cause of common, comprehensive and indivisible security for all of the peoples of the OSCE area.

As 2009 draws to a close, we find ourselves approaching the end of the Greek Chairmanship.

Much has happened this year to remind us that security in our region remains a work in progress. The global economic crisis has affected all our countries. We have worked hard to contain the aftermath of armed conflict in Georgia. Instability in Afghanistan continues to pose multi-faceted challenges for the security of our region. These are all potent reminders that we have still a lot of unfinished business ahead of us.

Despite often contrary winds, we have arrived in a safe port in Athens. But the year is not over. We have to agree on important decisions in the next two days to strengthen co-operative security across the OSCE area, to shape the work of our Organization, and to build a strong foundation for Kazakhstan to build upon as it assumes the OSCE Chairmanship on January 1st.

I hope that a constructive spirit will prevail in our deliberations, and we will part tomorrow with concrete results.

Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Greek Chairmanship has been guided by a single principle this year – the determination to serve as an “honest broker” to facilitate a renewed dialogue between the participating States in order to restore trust and build new common purpose.

This principle underpinned our decision to host the first informal ministerial meeting of the OSCE on Corfu in late June.

The meeting in Corfu provided a ray of hope in a stormy year. It was the first attempt for an informal, frank and open dialogue at the Ministers’ level on the current state and the future prospects of European security. We found broad acknowledgement of the fact that the OSCE, with its unique concept of comprehensive, co-operative and indivisible security and inclusive composition, provides an irreplaceable framework for restoring confidence and trust and for enhancing co-operation. On this basis, and with your unanimous valuable support, the Greek Chairmanship has launched the Corfu Process.

The discussions that followed in Vienna at the Ambassadors’ level, aimed to identify the main elements pertaining to the foundations for security in the Euro-Atlantic area, the challenges arising across the three OSCE dimensions, and obstacles to the implementation of commitments undertaken by the participating States.

Now, we must take our efforts a step further. We should decide on how we will move this process forward; how to determine concrete objectives, themes, modalities and benchmarks. These should be spelled out in clear, strong language. We must find the courage to move from dialogue to action. This will be our key strategic task today and tomorrow. We must end 2009 with strong foundations of clarity and resolve, in order to usher in the New Year – and the upcoming Chairmanship of Kazakhstan – with new direction and purpose.

Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The new dialogue on European Security can be meaningful only in so far as it is tied to concrete progress on key security challenges.

Over the course of the past year, we have seen some positive movement in settling longstanding obstacles to co-operative security in our region. The bold political decisions taken by Turkey and Armenia have not been easy, but they are very important.

We must now bring this same spirit of reconciliation to the unresolved conflicts that persist in the OSCE area. Through the unwavering efforts of the Greek Chairmanship, as it has also been the case in previous years, there has been no lack of valiant attempts to resolve these conflicts. Even last week, the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan met in Munich, under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group. Also last month, an informal meeting was held in Vienna, of the “5+2” negotiating format aimed at resolving the Transnistrian conflict. The OSCE, together with the UN and the EU, has co-chaired eight rounds of

discussions held in Geneva on security and stability in Georgia following the August 2008 conflict, and we have seen some movement to stabilise cease-fire lines and to restore emergency channels of communication.

These are important steps, for which I would like to thank my Special Representatives, Ambassador Christopoulos and Ambassador Kasprzyk. Their dedication to creating the conditions for the peaceful settlement of conflicts has been remarkable and recognized by all.

Yet hard work remains ahead in resolving these conflicts –not just for the negotiators designated by the Chairmanship to act on our behalf, but also for us, the participating States of the OSCE, in summoning the required political will to move ahead.

We must take qualitative steps forward to stabilize the situation in Georgia. Let us make no mistake – this effort suffered a setback this year with the closure of the OSCE Mission to Georgia. I am convinced that the need for the OSCE presence, in the conflict zones and throughout Georgia, is greater today than ever before – the Organization has unparalleled experience and unique tools to support efforts to promote peace, stability, democracy and the rule of law. It is time for the participating States to make the leap necessary to agree to a new OSCE presence on the ground.

The Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group have worked tirelessly to support the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan as they approach the time to take difficult decisions aimed at resolving their differences. Here in Athens, we must leave no doubt that this process enjoys the solid support of the entire OSCE community.

Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

One month from today, Greece's Chairmanship marathon will come to an end, and we will pass the torch to Kazakhstan. We have high hopes for the contribution the incoming Chairmanship can make in promoting conflict settlement and crisis management next year. Rest assured that Greece will provide full support to these efforts through its presence in the OSCE Troika.

We also welcome the heightened attention the incoming Kazakh Chairmanship will bring to bringing in the forefront of our attention the pressing priorities on security in Central Asia and in Afghanistan.

Two years ago in Madrid, the OSCE Foreign Ministers agreed that our Organization has a role to play in helping to promote security and stability in and around Afghanistan. Since then, the focus of OSCE work has fallen on strengthening border security and management on Afghanistan's northern border with its Central Asian neighbours, enhancing both national and regional law enforcement capacities as well as cross-border co-operation.

These efforts deserve our praise. But clearly, there is scope for the OSCE to do more, including through limited project activity on Afghan territory.

Long-term security and stability in Afghanistan can only be built on the basis of stronger regional co-operation with and around the country, including the constructive involvement

of the country's Central Asian neighbours. Regional teamwork should be promoted by all key international actors and organizations that are active in the region, including the OSCE. We are convinced that Kazakhstan, as Chair of the OSCE in 2010, can make a decisive difference in this regard, with the support of all of us.

Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Economic and Environmental Dimension has been at the heart of the Greek Chairmanship's priorities. This is only natural given the importance for our common security of challenges that arise in this field.

The 17th Economic and Environmental Forum saw productive discussions on the cross-dimensional aspects of migration. The scope and complexity of international migration has increased in the last years across the OSCE area. Stronger inter-state co-operation at the bilateral, regional and global levels is essential to elaborating and implementing sustainable policy solutions.

As we close a year that opened with the most severe gas crisis in recent memory, I hope that we can find agreement on a targeted role for the OSCE in promoting an inclusive, goal-oriented dialogue on aspects of energy security. We agreed to this in principle in Maastricht in 2003. Let's take the next step for a more enhanced engagement.

A week before the opening of the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, our deliberations on the security implications of climate change are also highly relevant. These issues matter to people in the street. The OSCE can and should have something to contribute.

This year, Greece has worked tirelessly to take forward the OSCE *acquis* in the Human Dimension, and to support the implementation by all of the commitments we have undertaken. Respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law were important guiding themes that underpinned all of our efforts in 2009.

This goes to the essence of the OSCE concept of security. Since 1975, our common endeavour has been driven by the idea that security begins with the 'inherent dignity of the individual.' We have agreed that genuine security can only be comprehensive, including politico-military cooperation, healthy economic governance and the rule of law. We have also agreed that the security of states is impossible without the security of societies and individuals.

This concept is demanding of states and societies. It is a project that requires permanent engagement by all, in working to achieve the implementation of commitments and in refining them to meet new needs. Throughout 2009, Greece has sought to support its partners in taking this concept forward in practice.

One area in which this effort has been particularly visible has been election observation, which remains a flagship activity of the Organization. This year saw key elections in the OSCE area. OSCE election observation methodology remains a gold standard the world over, and a justifiable source of pride. I wish to commend the ODIHR as well as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for their complementary and fruitful co-operation in observing elections and in promoting the further improvement of electoral systems throughout our

region. I would also like to thank the ODIHR and the Secretariat for their efforts in organizing and executing a challenging Election Support Team in Afghanistan.

Dear Ministers,
Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

If I have been less laconic than I would have liked, it is because I wanted to share with you an overview of the main themes in our full agenda for the next two days. I look forward to working with you to make this meeting a success.

In finishing, I wish to thank once again the previous Finnish Chairmanship for the strong legacy we inherited last January – Dear Alexander Stubb, your hospitality and your efficient management of the 2008 Ministerial Council decisions set high standards for the Greek Chairmanship. We also wish every success to the incoming Kazakh Chairmanship. Dear Kanat Saudabayev, chairing the OSCE is always challenging but also always interesting; you can count on our full support throughout 2010.

I wish also to take this opportunity to express the sincere gratitude of the Chairmanship to our Secretary General, Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, to the OSCE Secretariat, to the OSCE Institutions and to the OSCE Field Missions for all their invaluable support, hard work and dedication throughout this year.

I am fully convinced that the decisions that we will adopt over the next 48 hours will further strengthen our Organization and bring us closer to achieving our common objectives, and I am fully committed to work with all of you to this end.

Thank you.