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**STATEMENT BY MS. MICHELINE CALMY-REY,
FEDERAL COUNCILLOR AND HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Athens, 1 December 2009

Mr. Chairman,
Colleagues,

The chief aim of the OSCE is to safeguard security on the European continent and this is far from being merely a military issue.

One of the issues facing the European continent is the peaceful coexistence of different languages, cultures and religions, as it is evident that if we cannot live together harmoniously, our security can no longer be guaranteed.

Switzerland is experiencing this situation in very concrete terms. Last Sunday, against the recommendation of the government and the parliament, a popular initiative against the construction of new minarets was approved by the people of Switzerland. This result no doubt reflects fears and concerns aroused by the omnipresence of images of extremist excesses. It is a reaction of withdrawal and defence in a world characterized by globalization, economic crisis and rising unemployment. We are living in a period of transition, and the pressure that change exerts on people is strong. The majority who voted on Sunday were not opposed to the Muslim community established in our country but are rather calling the government to witness its profound unease.

The construction of new minarets in Switzerland is now prohibited, but not the construction of new mosques. The Muslims in Switzerland are well integrated and will continue to attend the 200 mosques in the country. The fact remains, however, that the freedom to practise the Muslim religion is restricted in terms of its public expression. If an appeal were to be made to the European Court of Human Rights, it would be up to that court to decide whether the new Swiss constitutional norm is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

This referendum does not in any way change Switzerland's foreign policy objectives. Switzerland maintains close social, political and economic relations with all of the Muslim countries. On the contrary, it will motivate us to continue even further to seek openness and partnership between Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

At all events, this referendum has given us cause for concern. The reality within our societies, in Europe and in the world, each setback to the coexistence of different cultures and religions, also poses a threat to our security. Provocation could engender further provocation and outrage could stir up extremism. It is for all of us to seek a solution to this problem, European and non-European countries, regardless of our religious diversity and our choice of society. This clearly shows that the multidimensional concept of security on which the OSCE is based is more relevant than ever.

Mr. Chairman,
Colleagues,

Thanks to the Greek Chairmanship, we all met five months ago on the island of Corfu.

At the end of the current phase, we need to arrive at a political declaration here in Athens on the renewal of European security dialogue. In this regard, we are interested to note the Russian draft Treaty on European Security that we have just received. We shall study this text carefully as it will provide a rich basis for discussion within our Organization.

If we are to confirm the importance of the OSCE as the sole platform for dialogue on security policy, we need to hone the instruments available to our Organization for conflict prevention and management.

It is important once again to reaffirm the political will to co-operate, particularly with respect to negotiations on unresolved conflicts. In this regard, Switzerland welcomes the resumption of the "5+2" talks and the recent progress in the Minsk process.

Mr. Chairman,
Colleagues,

Protection of human rights, promotion of democracy and development of the rule of law are essential conditions for maintaining international stability. These vital tasks are at the core of the mandate of another regional organization to which most OSCE participating States belong, namely the Council of Europe.

On 18 November Switzerland had the honour of taking over the chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers for six months. In my capacity as chairperson, I shall ensure that co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE is strengthened. In fact, thanks to their specific assets, these two organizations complement each other ideally.

In conclusion, I should like to express my warm thanks to the Greek Chairmanship for organizing this meeting and particularly for the considerable efforts it has devoted to promoting the Corfu Process. We wish every success to its successor, Kazakhstan, in furthering European security dialogue within our Organization.