

**STATEMENT BY  
FEDERAL MINISTER MR. MICHAEL SPINDELEGGER AT THE  
SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Mr. Chairman,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Mr. President of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following my swearing-in the day before yesterday and the government statement in the Austrian Parliament yesterday, I did not want to miss the opportunity of speaking today at the OSCE Ministerial Council here in Helsinki, my first foreign visit.

This visit underscores the great value attached to the OSCE by Austria — as headquarters of the Organization and as a country that had direct experience of the separation for decades of Europe and the feeling of insecurity that existed between the ideological blocs.

In 2009 we will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, 20 years of re-convergence of the European continent. The opportunities that have opened up for all of us and the security that we have all gained since then should make us all aware when we meet here to discuss the challenges facing us in the future of how valuable these things are.

Austria is firmly convinced that the OSCE has proved itself in this process of upheaval and demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. It is the only forum of its type that combines the idea of co-operative security and arms control with respect for democracy, human rights, basic freedoms and the rule of law.

Austria appreciates the comprehensive security principle on which the OSCE is based. In its fight against terrorism, organized crime, trafficking in drugs and human beings and the question of border security, the OSCE has acquired an impressive profile in the area of non-military security. We welcome in particular the development of border protection and management activities in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

The politico-military dimension is also of undiminished importance for us, however. In particular, Austria supports the complete implementation of the OSCE Code of Conduct, which we have co-ordinated within the Forum for Security Co-operation since May 2007.

For us, the OSCE is also a community of values to which we are all committed. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) ensures that we observe the commitments we have undertaken. OSCE election monitoring, conducted for the last decades on the basis of an internationally recognized methodology developed by the ODIHR, is an

indicator that is equally valid for all of us. We also emphatically support the efforts to improve the living conditions of Roma and Sinti. Austria welcomes the appointment of Ambassador Janez Lenarčič as the new ODIHR director and thanks his predecessor, Ambassador Christian Strohal, for successfully manoeuvring this flagship of the OSCE together with his crew through many bluffs.

Thanks to its flexible operative approach, the OSCE has produced outstanding achievements in conflict management and prevention. I therefore stress the importance for us of the legal personality of the OSCE and welcome the draft decision strengthening the legal framework of the OSCE and tasking the Greek Chairmanship to continue this work in 2009.

As holder of the Presidency of the European Union (EU) in 2006, Austria initiated a joint declaration on EU-OSCE co-operation. In view of recent developments we hope that Belarus will also soon join the existing consensus in this respect.

Austria also supports the Finnish initiative for co-operation in waterways, with particular focus on inland waterways, an area in which Austria has years of experience through its co-operation in the Danube region. For us the Danube region and Black Sea co-operation are binding elements within the OSCE membership.

I should like to thank the Finnish Chairmanship for its commitment and its many achievements over the last year and should also like to add our support for the planned issuance of a political declaration. This Ministerial Council is the ideal time and place to reconvene the spirit of Helsinki in a declaration that emphasizes the basic values of our Organization and its wide-ranging concept of security.

I thank the Chairmanship for its commitment with respect to regional conflicts. Austria has actively promoted a rapid settlement of the conflict in Georgia both in the OSCE and the European Union. We welcome the initial progress in the Geneva talks on security and humanitarian issues jointly conducted by the United Nations, the EU and the OSCE. However, we also expect specific improvements for the civilian population in the near future. For this purpose an international presence throughout Georgia is essential. OSCE and EU observers also need unobstructed access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia and other parts of the country. A rapid extension of the existing mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia is also necessary. It is hoped that the recent EU fact-finding mission will be able to clarify the causes of the conflict and — looking to the future — help avoid further conflict situations.

Finally, I should like to assure our full support to the future Greek Chairmanship and also to Kazakhstan, which in 2010 will be the first country in transition to assume the Chairmanship of the OSCE. We know how great a challenge this position presents for a country and trust that in its preparations for these tasks Kazakhstan will avail itself of the OSCE's great experience.

Thank you for your attention.