

OSCE Ministerial Council

Statement by Mr M. Verhagen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

Athens, 1-2 December 2009

Mr Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Greek Chairman-in-office for the warm hospitality offered here in Athens and this excellent chairmanship year by Greece.

In 2010 we will commemorate the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. Today, the Final Act is as significant as it was 35 years ago. In Helsinki, the ministers not only succeeded in starting co-operation between East and West. They also developed a normative code of conduct for relations between states and within states.

Since Helsinki, the political landscape in Europe has undergone a metamorphosis. Just a few weeks ago we commemorated the opening of the Berlin Wall, 20 years ago, marking the end of the division on Europe. But to this day, the Helsinki Final Act is the foundation on which the principles and values of the OSCE rest.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to express my commitment to continuing our discussion on the future of European security. In Corfu, we agreed that engaging in a dialogue and working together to promote security in Europe is in our common interest.

Reaffirming our support for the Corfu Process should be the outcome of our meeting today and tomorrow. I believe the Greek OSCE presidency deserves the credit for having guided us with dedication from Corfu to Athens. Let's make sure we leave Athens with tangible results.

I have taken note of the Russian proposal for a European security treaty and I will study this carefully. I don't see the proposed treaty as an alternative to the Corfu Process, however. We have just launched this process, we must use it to the full, and we must do so, as I just said, by putting words into deeds.

I believe the key to improving security in Europe is first and foremost of a political, not a legal nature. A political dialogue can lay the foundations for trust and confidence. That is why the Corfu Process is vital.

We have a lot of work ahead of us. We need to discuss topics in the field of security, such as arms control, crisis management, Confidence and Security Building Measures and transnational threats. But, equally important, we have to include the human dimension in the Corfu Process and discuss the implementation of OSCE commitments.

Allow me to make four points.

First, the Corfu Process is indeed a process. We should not expect a quick fix. It will take much time and effort to come to a result.

Second, we need to engage in a genuine dialogue to promote trust and confidence. The talks should be complemented by practical co-operation.

Third, we need to concentrate on the substance. There is no urgent need to replace the current security architecture. We need to improve it, adapt it and use its provisions to find better answers to the security challenges we are facing today.

I believe we need a 'hands on' approach. For example, we must take more effective steps to resolve the ongoing conflicts in the OSCE area, be it Georgia, in Moldova or Nagorno Karabakh.

Fourth and finally, our commitments in the field of human rights and democracy enable peace and security. We should therefore fully implement our commitments in this field. After all, security *between* states cannot be separated from security *within* states.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to take the opportunity to warmly welcome the achievements of the OSCE institutions, especially the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). I would especially like to praise their professionalism and dedication. Together with the men and women in the field, ODIHR and HCNM truly form the heart of the OSCE.

Mr Chairman, dear colleagues,

Finally, I would like to welcome Kazakhstan as the OSCE presidency in 2010 and minister Saudabayev as our Chairman-in-Office.

Being the chairman of the OSCE is an important and challenging job. But the OSCE chairmanship also involves defending the OSCE norms and principles in all dimensions of the OSCE and setting a good example to others. I will follow your achievements with great interest.

Thank you.