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**STATEMENT BY THE HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE
SECOND REVIEW CONFERENCE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE TREATY ON OPEN SKIES**

Vienna, 7 to 9 June 2010

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Conference participants and guests,

Today we are opening the Second Review Conference on the Implementation of the Treaty on Open Skies in the history of the Treaty's operation. At the same time, we are turning over the next page in the annals of pan-European and transatlantic co-operation in the area from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

Looking back at the years that have elapsed since the signing of the Treaty, we have become even more convinced that the conclusion of the Treaty on Open Skies was one of the most important political acts in the OSCE area, ensuring the development of confidence, openness and transparency among the States that signed that document in 1992 or acceded to it in subsequent years. The Treaty in fact has become a unique and unparalleled multinational instrument for strengthening confidence and security in a huge region.

In 2012 we shall mark the twentieth anniversary of the Treaty on Open Skies and a decade of its implementation. During that period we have trodden a difficult path in establishing the Treaty as a unique mechanism for co-operation among a large number of States in the interests of arms control.

We had a period of provisional application of the Treaty on Open Skies, when we did not yet have the national material and technical basis, clear and established mechanisms for the implementation of the Treaty's provisions and practical skills in the conduct of observation flights, and the first steps were taken to implement the Treaty on Open Skies by conducting trial observation flights and certifying Open Skies platforms.

Figuratively speaking, that period had a certain touch of romanticism, when a family is only just taking shape and the character and organization of the material basis are being honed, even though the final result was not yet entirely clear. However, the main thing that characterized that time in our view was the faith in the future of the Treaty, backed by real action. And it must be admitted that it was not all in vain, since the experience gained in the co-operation among the national Open Skies structures that evolved in the course of the trial flights provided a huge amount of material for the subsequent work of the Open Skies Consultative Commission (OSCC) and its informal working groups.

In the course of this work, the Commission drafted and adopted fundamental decisions to the Treaty on all aspects of its functioning, which together with the text of the Treaty on Open Skies formed the package for ratification.

The three-year period following the entry into force of the Treaty in 2002 was characterized by intensive work on the part of the Commission to elaborate major documents for the vital functioning of the Treaty with the aim of improving the legal, organizational and financial bases for its implementation. Suffice it to say that more than 40 decisions and statements by the Chairperson of the Commission were drafted and adopted by the OSCC on these questions during that period.

In addition, difficult processes took place at the national level to form and establish Open Skies structures, and co-operation with foreign colleagues was developed during the conduct of quota-based observation flights. During this period there were heated but ultimately fruitful discussions in the OSCC on the interpretation of certain provisions of the Treaty in view of the practical experience gained by States Parties during observation flights.

All this important work was commended at the First Review Conference on the Implementation of the Treaty on Open Skies in 2005.

The subsequent five-year period, which our Conference is reviewing, marked the Treaty's transition to a qualitatively new phase.

First of all, the States Parties have been given the opportunity to implement in full the quotas for observation flights set out in the Treaty.

In this context, the Russian Federation has continued to be the most observed State Party, having the largest realistically implementable passive quota of flights. Despite this fact, our Open Skies structures have done everything possible to accept as many foreign missions as possible and to create an environment for co-operation with foreign colleagues and comfortable living and working conditions for them.

The results of the Treaty's implementation over the last five years are impressive both in terms of the number of observation missions carried out and in terms of the quality of the co-operation among those directly involved, namely the verification centres.

In recent years, for a number of reasons, active use has begun to be made of joint observation flights, whereby a single active quota is shared between two or three States. In our view, this promotes the development of closer co-operation between the representatives of verification centres in the formulation of the mission plan and during the conduct of the mission. What is more, this joint work helps to improve mutual understanding and establish good personal relations between the verification personnel of different countries. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Russian specialists have established this kind of relationship with their colleagues from the United Kingdom in conducting the now already traditional joint flights over the territory of Georgia, and also with representatives of France, Sweden, Finland, the Benelux countries and a number of other States. We hope that this trend will continue.

As for the work of the OSCC during this period, I should like to make the following comments.

The Commission has continued its work to improve the legal and financial basis of the Treaty on Open Skies. The nature of this work has been a little different to work in previous years. Attention has principally been paid here to the further refinement of this basis and not to increasing quantitative parameters by way of newly issued documents.

A landmark development of the last five years has been the work to reshape the material basis of the Treaty – the Open Skies platforms. The possibility of using at this new stage all the categories of sensors permitted by the Treaty, the transition to digital technology and the aging of the existing fleet of Open Skies aircraft have all confronted the States Parties with difficult tasks.

The work of the international team of technical experts on sensors carried out within the OSCC special group was extremely difficult and tense. After all, the Treaty's future in effect depended on the results of their work. Today, although it is still too early to speak of final results, we take a positive view of the interim results of that group and we wish the experts every success and rapid progress in their work.

Let me now say a few words about the creation of new Open Skies platforms. This is in itself a major task, but most importantly an extremely costly one from a financial point of view. It is understandable that not all States Parties will be able to cope with this financial burden, especially if they do not have a great role to play in the implementation of the Treaty. In this connection, the question arises: how to implement the Treaty on Open Skies given the rapidly aging fleet of Open Skies aircraft?

In our view, there are no simple answers here. The Commission has much work ahead of it in analysing the existing situation and finding the best ways out of it. Russia, for its part, is willing to work constructively to that end on the basis of an analysis of the various options for resolving this problem.

In the years that have elapsed, some experience has been gained in the application of the Open Skies framework both in post-conflict monitoring and in the aerial observation of the consequences of natural disasters with a view to assessing the damage. Clearly we need to be ready for special flights of this kind and to work more actively in the future on the implementation of the Treaty's provisions on emergency observation flights, if the OSCC or individual States Parties receive such requests.

As for the use of the Treaty's mechanisms for environmental protection, Russia as a participant in a number of international environmental programmes would be willing to support steps to this end on the understanding that flights for the purpose of environmental monitoring will not be included in the existing active and passive quotas for observation flights distributed by the States Parties under the Treaty on Open Skies. In our view, such missions could be successfully carried out on the basis of mutual agreement by the States concerned. Apart from anything else, States Parties already wishing to do so can include in their mission plans flights over areas of environmental significance, using, of course, only those sensors permitted by the Treaty.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate the Russian Federation's commitment to the fundamental bases of the Treaty on Open Skies that have confirmed their viability during the period of its implementation. We trust that the atmosphere of co-operation, mutual respect and understanding that has evolved among the States Parties to the Treaty on Open Skies will be preserved and strengthened.

For this reason, the Russian Federation also supports the process of expanding the Treaty club through the accession of interested States.

Thank you for your attention.