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Carl Bildt, Minister for Foreign Affairs

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Speech by Carl Bildt at the OSCE Ministerial Council

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Let me start by congratulating the Lithuanian Chairmanship. You have had quite a number of challenging issues to deal with during your year as Chairman-in-Office. We have tried to support your efforts in various ways, and you should be proud of the achievements registered.

The events in North Africa and the Middle East have reminded us of the universality of fundamental freedoms and human rights and how they are intrinsically linked to security. The Arab awakening has highlighted the importance of the fundamental norms and principles of the OSCE's human dimension and the broad security concept.

OSCE participating states must abide by the OSCE acquis. Some states have a long way to go on the path to democracy and full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The deteriorating situation for democracy and human rights in Belarus, including the closure of the OSCE office, is a clear example of an unfortunate divide between words and deeds on the part of the Belarusian authorities. These kinds of violations of OSCE and other international commitments - such as the rule of law, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression - stand in sharp contrast to the solemn manifestations in Astana. Sweden was one of the 14 States that invoked the OSCE Moscow mechanism in response to the human rights situation in Belarus. Sweden and the EU have consistently called for an unconditional release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners in Belarus, including the human rights defender Ales Byalyatski.

But it is not only a matter of Belarus. The situation in Ukraine is worrying, in particular as the country is to assume the role of Chairman-in-Office in 2013. The situation calls into question Ukraine's ability and preparedness to be the guardian of OSCE commitments.

And speaking of the topics of the day: listening to the independent observers, it seems as if the Duma elections were not as completely free and fair as the people of Russia deserve.

We are deeply concerned that the protracted conflicts continue to present a serious threat to our common security. On one of these issues, there has been progress. We welcome the meeting in Vilnius on 30 November for the resumption of formal negotiations in the 5+2 format. Such progress is also important for the wider cooperation between Russia and the EU.

This Vilnius ministerial provides yet another opportunity to show our commitment to the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security by taking principled and operational decisions in all three dimensions. This includes strengthening one of this organization's core tasks, namely

the capacity to handle the entire conflict cycle. The autonomy of the OSCE institutions must be safeguarded, and adequate support should be provided to the field representations.

There is also an opportunity to reach agreement and take decisions in the politico-military dimension, including the modernisation of the Vienna Document on small arms and light weapons and the approach to transnational threats. We attach particular importance to the decisions on policing and on cyber security, and especially their clear commitment to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Other critical decisions are the safety of journalists and pluralism in the new media. Freedom on the Internet is key to the new wave of democratic aspirations sweeping through our world. Freedom on the net is the new frontline of the fight for freedom. Access to information empowers people and contributes to economic diversity and growth. Security on the Internet cannot be separated from freedom on the Internet for those of us who believe in the value of a free society. The rights and freedoms that we enjoy 'in real life' must be extended to the digital domain and to the Internet. In the same way, OSCE commitments within the human dimension should be upheld and respected offline as well as online. A political signal needs to be sent from Vilnius to this effect. Therefore, we are co-sponsors of the Draft Ministerial Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age and call for a new partnership in the OSCE for Freedom on the Internet as well as human cyber security.

Dear Colleagues, allow me to finish by reiterating our full support for the Chairmanship's efforts towards achieving a successful Ministerial Council in Vilnius. I would also like to express our support for the joint Switzerland and Serbia chairmanship of 2014 and 2015, and for their efforts to carry forward the important work of the OSCE.

Thank you.