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Speech by Frank-Walter Steinmeier,
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs,
at the OSCE Ministerial Council
in Madrid on 29 November 2007

Translation of advance text

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This year's OSCE Ministerial Council takes place at a time when decisions on key issues affecting European security and stability are imminent. We must do our joint best to set the right course – and be flexible enough to agree by consensus!

But first of all, I would like to thank you, Mr Chairman, for your excellent work at the helm of the OSCE this year. My thanks also goes to the Portuguese Council Presidency, which has already spoken for us in the name of the EU.

The past year has again shown that the work of the OSCE is not yet done, be it strengthening democracy and the rule of law, providing early warning and fostering the prevention and solution of conflicts, managing crises and controlling arms.

Arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation and confidence-building are core components of our security policy. We must retain and expand the OSCE's unique and mature network of conventional arms control mechanisms, which can furthermore serve as a model for the prevention and solution of conflicts beyond the OSCE's borders.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It remains our shared goal to maintain the CFE regime as an anchor of stability and to bring the Adapted CFE Treaty into force as quickly as possible. In this spirit, the group of affected states held frank discussions yesterday with the aim of finding a way out of the current crisis. We must continue to endeavour to avert all potential damage and refrain from doing anything that could harm the CFE regime. Proposals that could move things forward are on the table, and have wide support. We should seize this chance while we have it.

Bringing protracted regional conflicts within the OSCE area to a peaceful solution will remain one of the OSCE's core tasks. Stability and security in the Southern Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova very much depend on the constructive cooperation of all parties and their willingness to compromise. Our efforts to settle these conflicts by peaceful means have not led to any tangible successes during the past year, but slight progress has nonetheless been made. The OSCE's economic reconstruction programme in South Ossetia, Georgia, is a step

in the right direction. Germany has played a significant part in this, both as a member of the EU and bilaterally.

Security and stability in the OSCE area are inconceivable without democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The work of the OSCE institutions in this field is both important and well executed. In this context, I would like to give special mention to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. ODIHR has monitored more than a dozen elections across the OSCE area this year. We regret that ODIHR has been unable to observe the preparations for the Russian parliamentary elections in its usual manner, and will not be in the country on election day. The independent monitoring of elections by ODIHR, in coordination with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, is internationally recognized as one of the core competences of the OSCE, which has to be retained and reinforced. The same is true of the open dialogue between civil society and governments, for which the OSCE provides an unmatched forum.

The OSCE field missions make an indispensable contribution to supporting structural reform and processes of transition in the participating states. The missions in South East Europe are a good example of this. In Kosovo, the OSCE mission ensured that the elections went off smoothly, although held at very short notice. OMIK has been doing valuable work for years, especially as regards the protection and promotion of the non-Albanian ethnic groups. This work must be continued in the interest of Kosovo's stability!

As the work in South East Europe is gradually being completed, the OSCE can increasingly shift its focus to assisting the countries of Central Asia. The OSCE plays a key role in the implementation of the EU Strategy on Central Asia, a role exemplified by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, which prepares young people from throughout Central Asia for work on the international stage. In Central Asia, as in other regions, the EU is a firm believer in the OSCE.

When strengthening our security, we have to look beyond the borders of the OSCE area. The dialogue with our cooperation partners in Asia and the Mediterranean is a vital instrument to this end. And by helping Central Asian countries improve their border management capabilities, the OSCE can make a contribution to regional cooperation in Central Asia and to establishing security and stability for our partner country Afghanistan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OSCE needs legal certainty if it and its staff are to do their work properly. Let us now therefore establish the required conditions so that the convention on the legal personality, legal capacity, and privileges and immunities of the OSCE may enter into force.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your untiring efforts to find a consensual solution to the issue of the OSCE Chairmanships from 2009 to 2011. The functioning of the OSCE will be judged not least by whether we manage to reach agreement on this matter here in Madrid.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am confident that the OSCE will continue to actively champion peace and security and campaign for the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law under the upcoming Finnish chairmanship. Please rest assured that you have our full support.