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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is good to be here. As you know, the OSCE's work has always been close to my heart. It is an important pillar of our security architecture. Let me first salute the hard work of Dimitrij Rupel and his team in steering the OSCE with great skills through difficult waters.

Dear colleagues,

2005 has been a particularly **intense year** for the OSCE region and the OSCE as an organization. Since Sofia, we have seen impressive democratic **changes in Ukraine** and crucial political developments in **Kyrgyzstan**. Elsewhere in Central Asia, however, in particular in **Uzbekistan**, we hope that the government will place its policy firmly within the OSCE values and commitments.

Last year also saw an important evolution in **existing conflicts** in the OSCE region. The Nagorno-Karabakh crisis may see major progress in the very near future. New momentum has emerged on the Transnistria conflict, thanks to the initiative from Ukraine and Moldova. We will support these efforts through our border assistance mission, which I just launched a few days ago in Odessa.

In Georgia, we hope that Georgia's conflict resolution plan and the Russian-Georgian agreement on fulfilling the Istanbul commitments will lead to progress in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Enhancing **regional, comprehensive and human security** is the **raison d'être** of this Organization. Its added value ultimately lies in its contribution to security for the people.

The OSCE – with its three dimensions and its strong focus on human security – is uniquely equipped to work towards this goal, with even more determination. The **EU remains committed** to reinforcing the OSCE's work with all of its many foreign policy instruments and to supporting it financially. The Commission is among the biggest donors of extra-budgetary contributions.

In the last year, we have started implementing the **European Neighbourhood Policy**. We have already achieved considerable progress with Ukraine and Moldova. We also expect to conclude Action Plans with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia soon.

OSCE actions throughout these regions, from election support to field missions, **complement** and support our goals.

The Neighbourhood Policy is a key foreign policy priority for the EU. Promoting stability and reforms around us is a **win-win policy** for Europe and its partners, and in implementing it, we see further potential for synergies with the OSCE.

In Central Asia the OSCE is also a unique institutional partner. The experience of the last months has shown that we need stronger **EU activity in Central Asia** and at the same time a structured reinforcement of OSCE's action throughout its three dimensions.

But co-operation in the field is only one side of EC-OSCE relations. The European Commission, with its large foreign policy toolbox, is well placed to cooperate with the OSCE to strengthen security from **innovative angles**: Regarding human security, but also concerning energy and transport issues, through better border and migration management and support for good governance and institution-building.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me briefly touch upon the **OSCE reform process**.

The OSCE must be equipped with the right structure and working methods. A year ago in Sofia, we agreed on strengthening the Organisation. **Reform should reinforce the OSCE** as a key promoter of comprehensive security in Europe.

The **“reform” agenda** is, of course, complex and sometimes sensitive. Therefore, we should never lose sight of our founding values. The Helsinki principles are as significant as ever. They must be protected. We should not underestimate what we have achieved on this basis.

Since the launch of the reform process, notable progress has been made thanks to the panel of eminent persons. **Balanced options for the future** are on the table. We must not lose this momentum. Dialogue, without taboos and based on our founding principles, should allow us to deliver a stronger organization in the course of 2006.

We would like to see an OSCE more focused on crucial security concerns and conflict resolution, an OSCE with even more efficient institutions, a stronger role of the Secretary-General, and – finally – agreement on specific fields of action where the Organisation has a specific contribution to make.

The OSCE’s increasing action in **countering the new threats** such as terrorism and trafficking is therefore very welcome. Here, I believe that **Belgium’s ideas** to strengthen OSCE-actions against organised crime and regarding transport links are important.

Dear colleagues,

We need “more” OSCE, not “less”: There is no scope for reduction or regression, particularly not in the field of human security. “Rebalancing” the OSCE must not be done at the expense of the human dimension,. I should like to underline that ODIHR’s activities remain of utmost importance. Undermining our common achievements in these fields, especially on elections, would be short-lived and counter-productive in the broader political landscape.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In **concluding**, I would again like to welcome the appointment of our new Secretary General, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, who will help manage and guide the organization through this crucial period. I should also like to congratulate Slovenia for its extremely astute and energetic steering of OSCE in this important phase. And I wish our Belgian friends every success in the challenging year ahead. Please rest assured that the European Commission and I in particular shall spare no effort to help.