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**STATEMENT BY  
MR. JEAN ASSELBORN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
AND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF LUXEMBOURG,  
AT THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE  
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Vilnius, 6 and 7 December 2011

Mr. Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Last year in Astana our Heads of State or Government launched a tremendous and ambitious project calling for a free, democratic, united and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community rooted in shared commitments, common goals and respect for the inherent dignity of each individual.

We are gathered here today in Vilnius to give substance to this vision of the future by adopting concrete and ambitious decisions that will permit us to confront the challenges of the twenty-first century in the face of an unprecedented economic and financial crisis that could well cause new tensions and lines of division within our societies.

Mr. Chairperson,

The new electronic media today allow more people than ever before in the history of humanity to benefit from more objective and diversified information and to freely express their opinions. Moreover, recent major developments to the south of the OSCE region have shown the extent to which this new freedom of expression is at the very heart of democratic processes. We do not have the right to allow these fundamental freedoms to be weakened or relativized. Every individual is entitled to obtain information from different sources and to express his or her opinion freely and without hindrance. Freedom of information does not tolerate filtering.

For this reason we need to intensify our commitments in the human dimension to respond to the challenges set by this major technological progress and to ensure that everyone can enjoy the benefits of a genuine diversification of information sites and platforms. I therefore attach the greatest importance to the adoption of a substantive draft decision on the application of the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of expression to the new media.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is highly regrettable to note that journalists in the OSCE region continue day after day to be persecuted, hounded, threatened, mistreated and even murdered because of the exercise of their profession. As Ms. Dunja Mijatović, our Representative on Freedom of the Media, whom I should like to congratulate for her unfailing courage and commitment, regularly reports, the situation of journalists is not improving – quite the contrary, alas! For that reason I believe that an ambitious decision here in Vilnius that recalls and supplements existing commitments to protect the person and integrity of journalists and media professionals is all the more pressing.

I should also like to advocate strengthening our co-operation and political and financial support for the three institutions that are the strength of the OSCE: the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The autonomy of these institutions and their impartiality are guarantees of their credibility and authority. This autonomy should not be challenged but rather reinforced. In doing so we shall be affirming the commitments we have undertaken and which are at the heart of this Organization. Any challenging of these commitments will meet with our firm opposition.

Mr. Chairperson,

The crises and conflicts in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan have shown that our conflict prevention and rapid response mechanisms need to be supplemented and updated. Dialogue on European security has been under way within the OSCE for three years and has given rise to a good number of useful proposals for remedying the situation – albeit without a concrete decision to date.

The time has therefore come to mobilize the necessary political will to adopt a robust decision that will enable this Organization to do its work by giving it the means necessary to react rapidly and effectively to a crisis or conflict situation. To do this it is vital to make the crisis management procedures more flexible by giving the Chairmanship the possibility of dispatching an expert or mediation mission without delay to a crisis spot. I should like to stress this point which I believe to be crucial. The Secretariat's analysis and early-warning capacities also need to be strengthened.

We must also redouble our determination and efforts to give fresh impetus to the peaceful settlement of frozen conflicts, particularly in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh, where the situation remains deadlocked. As far as Transdniestria is concerned, I am gratified to note that formal negotiations in the “5+2” format have been resumed after being suspended for five years and that the process for settling the Transdniestrian conflict has thus been put back on track again. I should like to congratulate the Chairmanship, mediators, observers and parties, who have made it possible to achieve this important result, while hoping that the resumption of formal negotiations will rapidly produce concrete results.

Mr. Chairperson,

This year we have seen truly revolutionary democratic transformations in the countries of some of our Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation in North Africa. It will now be up to the people in these countries to take their destiny into their own hands and to

take the next steps. The OSCE should be willing to support them by making available its instruments and vast experience in democratization that it has acquired over the last decades. I am unreservedly in favour of concretely strengthening co-operation with our Mediterranean and Asian partners and of adopting a decision of substance on the matter. I also support the adoption of a decision and a project package so as to further strengthen the OSCE's commitment to Afghanistan.

I should like to warmly support the application by our partner and friend Mongolia for membership of the OSCE. Luxembourg would certainly respond positively to this request from a country whose situation is already familiar to all of us. This candidature is no doubt also a mark of recognition of the attractiveness and relevance of our Organization, but it should nevertheless be considered on its own merits. I should also like to see our Mediterranean partnership enlarged through the addition of Libya as soon as it is ready to apply.

Our Heads of State or Government in Astana called on the OSCE participating States to modernize and revitalize the conventional arms control regimes. I regret that the negotiations on a framework document to extricate the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe from the crisis it has found itself in since the Russian moratorium in 2007 have failed. The lack of a result should not discourage us or make us give up – quite the contrary! We must renew our efforts without delay to reduce conventional arms to the lowest possible level while at the same time increasing transparency in the military domain.

Regarding the strengthening of confidence-building measures decided upon in Astana, we welcome the progress made to enable us to update the Vienna Document 1999. The modifications that have been introduced are only a first step, however, and I urge the OSCE participating States to agree on more substantial improvements. Luxembourg is co-sponsoring several initiatives to increase predictability and transparency in the military domain, in particular by lowering the notification thresholds for military activities and improving the annual exchange of military information. With a view to helping to improve the OSCE's conflict-prevention capacities, we are also co-sponsoring an initiative on the sending of a multinational inspection to prevent a conflict from occurring on the basis of incorrect information or perceptions of the situation.

I am pleased to note that we are well on the way to determining the Chairmanship of our Organization in 2014. I welcome the fact as well that a decision for 2015 could also be taken at this meeting, even though I realize that it will be difficult. It will enable the OSCE to look to the future more serenely and to better plan its long-term activities.

Mr. Chairperson,

This year we elected Mr. Lamberto Zannier as Secretary General of the OSCE, and I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate him on his new responsibilities that he has assumed in the last three months or so. In view of the challenges faced by our Organization his task will not be easy. I look forward to an excellent co-operation with him.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express my congratulations to you, Mr. Chairperson, and the highly dedicated members of the Lithuanian Chairmanship for the excellent work performed during the course of the year, and my thanks for the generous hospitality shown to us in this beautiful city of Vilnius.

Finally, I should like to express my best wishes to the future Irish Chairmanship and to assure it of our support in the important and difficult task it will take on in the course of the next year. I am sure that in 2012 we shall be able to reach new decisive milestones on the way to realizing our ambition of creating a real security community so as to make our region safer, more stable and more prosperous.

Thank you for your attention.