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**Statement by H.E. Artis Pabriks, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Latvia at the OSCE Ministerial Council, 5-6 December
2005, Ljubljana**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Slovenian Government for the work done during this year as well as for the hospitality extended to us in Ljubljana.

In 2005 the OSCE celebrated the 30th anniversary of the signing of Helsinki Final Act. This Act started the process of democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe, promoted freedom and human rights thus facilitating the fall of totalitarian regimes and “Iron Curtain”. The CSCE was especially important for Latvia since with the support of this process we regained our independence and together with other new democracies rejoined Europe. The first NGO in Latvia that started talking about re-establishing Latvia as an independent and democratic state was called “Helsinki 86” and it gave the courage for others to follow suit.

Now, fifteen years after we regained independence, our people enjoy the highest standards set by international institutions including the OSCE.

Maybe it is not a coincidence that particularly this year the participating states started to discuss more actively the OSCE reform. The recommendations of the Panel of eminent persons provided us with useful instruments for reviewing OSCE activities and for strengthening the effectiveness of the organization. It goes without saying that OSCE needs such reform that is aimed at the enhancement of the capacity of the organization and ability to address the challenges of the 21st century.

However, against the background of the ongoing debate on reform of the OSCE, Latvia considers the norms and commitments by the Helsinki process as valid today as ever. While sharing the main ideas expressed in the eminent persons’ report about the improving the effectiveness of the OSCE we would like to express our support for the main areas of OSCE’s current work through all three dimensions, in particular the human dimension.

It is our conviction that the human dimension has been one of the core achievements of the OSCE since its establishment. The OSCE has developed comprehensive commitments through the human dimension – promotion of democratic values, respect for human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, free and fair elections.

We welcome the decisions that will be adopted in the field of human dimension. After the successful tolerance and non-discrimination conferences in Berlin, Paris, Brussels and Cordoba it is time now to concentrate on implementation of the declarations of these conferences.

We value the work of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman in Office in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination and we strongly support the extension of the mandate of the Representatives also next year.

The issue of anti-Semitism deserves our attention everywhere in the OSCE region. Unfortunately we note with concern that the scourge of anti-Semitism has not diminished and has even grown in force in some Participating States. Therefore, it is important that the commitments undertaken in previous OSCE conferences in Berlin and Cordoba are implemented.

The OSCE plays an important role in combating trafficking in human beings. Important documents in Maastricht, Sofia as well as in this Ministerial Councils reaffirm OSCE commitments to fight this heinous crime. We appreciate the valuable work done by the OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in human beings in this regard.

Mr. Chairman,

One of the OSCE's unique strengths is election observation. The importance of this field the OSCE has shown by observing a number of important elections, including last year's elections in Ukraine, this year in Kirgizstan. Therefore we think that existing commitments in this field must be preserved. The ODIHR has a well developed methodology for comprehensively observing the electoral process as well as good experience. ODIHR has to be autonomous in decision making process and in preparing reports. We must be careful while reviewing election observation standards.

The autonomy of other OSCE institutions should be also maintained and preserved. The institutions should be free in operating in the framework of their mandates.

Mr. Chairman,

In a changing security environment it is important to strengthen the OSCE's flexibility of response. Threats, such as terrorism, organised crime and intolerance influence all three dimensions of the OSCE. Democratization, rule of law and good governance are essential factors in fighting these new threats. Comprehensive approach to security and cooperation with other international organizations is very important.

The fulfilment of the Istanbul commitments remains the key factor to the solution of the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia and must therefore be implemented without delay. We welcome the joint declaration signed by Georgia and Russian Federation on the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of Georgia by 2008. We regret that there is no progress with regard to the withdrawal of Russian military forces and equipment from the territory of Moldova as well as we urge its resumption and completion as soon as possible.

The frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia have not been solved more than a decade. These issues should not be only in the agenda of the OSCE but requires more active involvement in order to achieve final settlements. Georgian latest plan for the settlement of the South Ossetian conflict is a good basis to this end.

The efforts should be reinforced in the resolution of the Transnistrian problem. The settlement of the Transnistrian problem should be carried out with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. Demilitarisation and democratisation of Transnistria are essential factors to achieve this goal. We welcome the engagement of EU and US as observers in the negotiations of Transnistrian settlement. We are also encouraged by the EU decision to launch a Border assistance mission on the Moldovan – Ukrainian border.

Next year will be crucial for South Eastern Europe. We welcome the developments on Kosovo issue. We stress, however, that implementation of the Standards for Kosovo must be intensified. We see continued OSCE long-term engagement in this process.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally I would like to express my hope that this year the participating states will be able to agree on political declaration as it contains a number of very important issues for this organization.

OSCE is organization which from time to time could not avoid criticism, but we can escape irrelevance and it is up to us today and days to follow to bring solutions to those in need.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.