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STATEMENT
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THE HOLY SEE'S RELATIONS WITH STATES, AT THE
FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Brussels, 4 December 2006

Mr. Chairman,

Participating for the first time in the OSCE Ministerial Council as Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, I should like first of all to transmit to this assembly the greetings and best wishes of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

In the more than 30 years that have elapsed since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE'S geopolitical horizon has changed considerably: the Cold War is over, the European institutional architecture has evolved, East-West political dialogue takes place at various negotiating tables, and societies in several participating States are undergoing profound changes and sometimes painful transitions on their way to democratization and integration.

However, there are participating States in the OSCE belonging to three continents, that continue to meet and engage in dialogue, while the missions in the field are involved in implementing the various transition processes. Occasions such as this one therefore present a serious opportunity to adapt and strengthen the effectiveness of the Organization, not to modify its basic values and principles but rather to ensure that it retains its meaningfulness at the start of the twenty-first century. Moreover, to have "effective" democracies, there is a need for "effective" multilateralism.

As a result, the Holy See strongly hopes that this meeting will strengthen and update the OSCE *acquis*, refining the instruments at its disposal for achieving its ultimate objective of peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region through safe and prosperous societies that promote human dignity and in doing so recognize its fundamental religious dimension.

With this in mind, it is important to provide effective responses to the challenges that threaten the participating States from without. I am thinking in particular of terrorism, and I believe that the OSCE can and must continue to shore up the international legal framework that is combating this scourge. The decisions on countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes and on measures to prevent the criminal use of lost/stolen passports are therefore to be welcomed.

There is also a need to respond with determination to the internal challenges within the Organization. Among these, it is imperative that the competences of the Organization's institutions are defined more clearly. In this context, I should like to recall that the OSCE is essentially a political forum whose activities are related to security, with decisions being adopted by governments and institutions having to be careful to implement them without redefining, enlarging or modifying them. Each government therefore relies on the impartiality of the institutions and on their sincere intention to respect the structures of governance and the procedures of the Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See welcomes the fact that efforts are being made here in Brussels to better define and update the "catalytic" role played by the OSCE in regional co-operation at the economic and environmental level. I refer in particular to the discussion on transport and energy security and to the contribution in the fields of migration and integration. These are emerging problems that give rise to economic and social injustice. The strategic antagonisms at the root of the "race" for energy sources are well known. The OSCE can contribute to resolving the differences between the "contestants" in this "race" and also between them and those who are excluded. For its part, migration modifies the cultural and religious composition of countries; there is therefore an increasingly urgent need to foster co-operation between migrants and the communities that welcome them in an atmosphere of mutual respect and the search for the common good.

Regarding the human dimension, the Holy See warmly welcomes the documents calling for an intensification of measures to combat trafficking in human beings with an approach that focuses on the victims. The scourge of sexual exploitation of children, which is often linked to trafficking in human beings, also requires particular attention. As befits its role, the Catholic Church will continue to raise international awareness of the extent and seriousness of these scourges.

The Holy See is also particularly interested in the question of tolerance. This year we have seen how education systems and the media and also the language of politics have become aware of their responsibility to avoid stereotypes, prejudices, intolerance in general and contempt for religions in particular. Apart from anything else, how can religions promote respect and understanding with any authority and effectiveness if they are themselves victims of stereotyping and prejudice?

It should not be forgotten either that a Catholic priest was murdered and that Christians have been the victims of violence and aggression within the OSCE region. All religions are in danger as soon as one of them is the victim of stereotyping and prejudice. All religions are in danger as long as the intolerance encountered by one of them is not recognized or is relativized.

As Pope Benedict XVI recently recalled in Turkey, "recognition of the positive role of religions within the fabric of society can and must impel us to explore more deeply their knowledge of man and to respect his dignity". The Holy See therefore hopes that this knowledge and respect will appear transparently and honestly in the area of the OSCE and its institutions, particularly in the field of tolerance.

Finally, I should like to express to the Belgian Chairmanship my utmost satisfaction at its effective management during the course of the year and the generous hospitality accorded to us here, and I should also like to wish every success to the incoming Spanish Chairmanship.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.