

OSCE Review Conference, Warsaw, 30 September 2010
Opening address by OSCE PA President Petros Efthymiou

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today. And it is an even greater pleasure to see in this room members of civil society, who are once again included in the OSCE process. Dialogue on our commitments has always been at the heart of what first the CSCE and, now, OSCE stand for. For this reason, I am indeed happy that in the framework of this review conference representatives of governments come face-to-face with courageous individuals and groups who want to hold us to account.

In a few months, in early December, we shall be holding the Summit in Astana – an event essentially marking the conclusion of the fruitful Kazhak Chairmanship. In preparation for Astana, it is appropriate to undertake a thorough review of our standing. In this Review Conference, I hope that all participants will keep in mind the intended focus. And this may be summarized in a single question: Are our governments sticking to the commitments they made to other OSCE participating States, and to all of us, as citizens?

Still, despite my optimism, I must express my disappointment that an effective review of our commitments is such an exceptional event. In my opinion, open reviewing of commitments should be an integral part of the day-to-day work of the OSCE. As I have noted on several occasions, the OSCE must remain a truly effective organization, an organization that plays a proactive role. To do so, we must engage in open dialogue on the crucial issues that lie before us. The OSCE will be much more successful in its endeavors if it opts for reviewing its agenda – and its implementation –

in public. This holds true for the Permanent Council in Vienna as well - whose workings ought to become more transparent, more open, as they give the impression of taking place with secrecy, behind closed doors. This Review Conference is certainly a good starting place. But we have to make sure it is not the end to this process.

There is no doubt that the Parliamentary Assembly plays a key role in dialogue. Indeed, it is perhaps the only place in the OSCE where open debate takes place on a regular basis. Free dialogue, as is the case with the PA, where we hold each other accountable, is critical for the Organization. Similarly, OSCE parliamentarians play a vital role in ensuring effective monitoring of our election-related commitments - and we will continue to perform this critical duty.

In the coming week, the city of Warsaw shall become the ground for discussion and policy-making regarding human rights and the rule of law. These issues were at the very heart of the Helsinki process - and must remain at the heart of our work today. Among them there are, indeed, worries we must acknowledge: particularly in the fields of elections and media freedom, where the OSCE conducts excellent monitoring work.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If we are to make genuine progress in fulfilling our obligations, we should identify commitment to the rule of law as the core of our efforts. Representative government, achieved through free and fair elections, is the basis for the rule of law. A free and unbiased media environment, in which journalists can hold a government accountable before public opinion, is critical to our societies. Effective rule of law is a fundamental starting point for all our efforts in suppressing human trafficking; in preventing torture; in eliminating gender-based discrimination; in ensuring fair treatment of all persons; and in fighting organized crime – to mention just some of the many issues

that will be addressed in the coming days.

It is not my intention to list today the many commitments we have all made to each other since the Helsinki Final Act was signed. However, we should keep in mind not only the commitments that we have, but also those we don't have. Preparation for a meeting of Heads of State and Government is an excellent opportunity to consider how we can strengthen our work with meaningful political commitments.

It is the Corfu Process that has broadened the horizons of this Review Conference -and shall do so with the planned Summit. Since the Corfu Process, we have gone a long way. Dialogue in the OSCE has certainly improved, but must continue to improve - and I urge you all not to remain satisfied with the state of things. If the CSCE and OSCE have been successful to this date, it is thanks to the remarkable input of our political leaders in the 1970s. If the OSCE is to stay relevant – if it is to live up to its potential in the 21st Century - similar courage and vision are once again necessary. And this is up to all of us.

Thank you.