

A D D R E S S

ENGLISH only

by H.E. Jaroslav BAŠTA

First Deputy Minister

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at the 13th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Secretary General, Distinguished Colleagues,

Let me first express our appreciation to the Republic of Slovenia for the warm hospitality here in Ljubljana. I would also like to commend you personally, Mr. Chairman, as well as all the members of your OSCE team, for the excellent leadership and for the dedicated work throughout 2005.

While fully subscribing to the statement made on behalf of the European Union, I would like to express our national views on some issues of particular importance.

2005 has been a year of important anniversaries for the OSCE. We have reflected on the historical significance of the Helsinki Final Act and jointly acknowledged the contribution of the Helsinki process to outstanding political transformation of Europe and beyond in last three decades. Indeed, CSCE/OSCE has proved its relevance and utility in promoting and applying in practice all the Helsinki Final Act principles.

Last Ministerial Council launched the process of strengthening the effectiveness of the Organization. It is clear that OSCE has to evolve in order to be able to respond to new challenges. Yet OSCE reform should not distract and prevent us from contributing to conflict prevention and management, protection of human rights and promotion of democratic development all around the OSCE area. This is the old Helsinki agenda – and it remains as important as ever. We should be frank with ourselves – is this Organization ready to take on new and new tasks while not being able to fully accomplish the old Helsinki agenda?

While these structural changes and decisions may be called for by ever changing security environment, the core commitments on human rights and democratic development as specified in the 1991 Moscow Human Dimension Meeting must

remain intact. Reaffirming and upholding them would serve the Organization better than calling into question the autonomy of ODIHR and its election observation related activities.

Our overriding objective to strengthen the effectiveness of the Organization in tackling new threats should go hand in hand with increasing its efficiency in promoting shared values and implementing common principles and commitments. However, we cannot speak about the OSCE's efficiency in this regard as long as we continue to witness the lack of respect for democratic values in member states. Sadly enough, this lack of respect has been manifested by human rights violations in Belarus as well as by disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force against demonstrators in Andijan, Uzbekistan. Refusal to cooperate with the OSCE and honour the commitments is putting substantial strains on OSCE-wide political dialogue. Lack of transparency and genuine political will to engage in a debate about shortcomings in democratic development and protection of human rights can never be substituted by structural changes. In determining the way forward, we should at all times be guided by what the Eminent Persons stated in their report: "the most important step towards a stronger and more relevant OSCE is a firm recommitment to the standards and political commitments its leaders have signed up to since 1975."

A key, traditional area of OSCE activities has been prevention of conflicts and their peaceful settlement. We have not progressed much in search for the peaceful settlement of frozen conflicts since last year, yet there have been developments and initiatives which may prove helpful to creating more favourable conditions for progress next year. We call on all parties engaged to seize new opportunities in all respective settlement formats.

As we stated already last year the full implementation of the Istanbul commitments made in 1999 vis-à-vis Moldova and Georgia is bound to be a further impetus to settlement talks. We applaud the governments of the Russian Federation and Georgia for reaching the agreement in May this year on the withdrawal of the Russian military bases stationed in Georgia by 2008. Signing and implementing the agreement by both sides will complete this process. We hope similar steps can be taken in

relation to Moldova soon. It would pave the way for the Adapted CFE Treaty to come into force without further delay.

Finally, in wishing every success to the incoming Belgian Chairmanship, I want to stress that no miraculous therapy will redress our current difficulties and revitalize this Organization unless we are unified in common purpose – which is by the way the title of the report we mandated last year.