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**STATEMENT BY
MR. SERGEI MARTYNOV, MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS,
AT THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Vilnius, 6 and 7 December 2011

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished colleagues,

Today the European region is encountering increasing threats and challenges. It is in effect in the grip of a series of crises at many different levels and differing in nature. What in fact, if we look at the situation without rose-coloured glasses, is the OSCE region facing?

We can begin by mentioning the debt crisis and the crisis affecting the financial system, which have already seriously weakened the basis of European stability. These crises hold the threat of producing further dangerous tectonic shifts in the areas of economics and finance capable of undermining the very foundations of European society.

We might also point to the crisis affecting the socio-economic situation of the masses of the population, which has sparked large-scale protests against the systematic and flagrant violation of the economic and social rights of the people. There have been regular demonstrations across the United States of America, the United Kingdom and a large number of other European countries, the list of which could be continued.

These conditions have also shed light on the crisis surrounding the reaction of governments to mass protests regarding economic as well as environmental issues. Instead of meeting the demands of the millions of protesters, the response has in the best of cases been to resort to measures further restricting their economic situation, to requisition their earnings in order to pay for the mistakes committed by financial and economic policy-makers and, in a number of cases, to resort to the forceful suppression of demonstrations, including the use of water cannons in places where the temperature is near freezing, rubber bullets, tear gas, arrests and sentences by the courts.

There is also a crisis in the politico-military area, although none of us talks very loudly about it. For many years now it has not been possible to achieve progress in resolving the stalled situation surrounding the conventional arms control regime in Europe. This is specifically mentioned in the joint statement adopted today by the member countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) regarding the issues involved in the OSCE's politico-military dimension and in countering transnational threats and challenges. The

Belarusian presidency of the CSTO has distributed that statement as an official document of today's ministerial meeting.

The unilateral deployment of a European missile defence system may well strike a new and serious blow against the system of arms control in Europe. This step is fraught with direct and threatening consequences for the nuclear safety of the continent and the entire system of control over strategic offensive weapons.

It is perfectly clear that we can deal with crises of this kind only through joint and concerted efforts. Where however should these joint and concerted efforts be undertaken if not within the framework of the one and only universal European organization, namely our Organization, the OSCE? But how in fact has the OSCE responded to all these challenges? The answer is by doing practically nothing.

Unfortunately, the OSCE Chairmanship this year has also been unable to ensure an agenda to meet the unresolved challenges. The absence of effective and even comprehensible actions in response to the acute and genuinely fateful threats to European security and co-operation make it necessary to also speak of the crisis as regards the effectiveness and meaningfulness (or relevance) of the OSCE. As a result, our Organization faces a real risk of being sidelined as the historical process unfolds. "Risk" is perhaps too gentle a word to adequately describe today's situation.

You may ask, what do we propose? We have no ready-made solutions, any more than anyone else has. There is, however, an understanding of what steps to enhance the effectiveness of our Organization could help to solve these problems affecting the OSCE itself and its region.

We and our partners have repeatedly proposed solutions for the reform of the OSCE and for its transformation into a genuine and powerful international organization consisting of equal partners. However, for years now these proposals have been blocked. Today, it is particularly appropriate, for example, to recall that Belarus and a number of other countries have over a period of years and even decades sought to have the OSCE pay far greater attention to specifically the economic basket, which has today so dangerously blown up in our face on the continent, and have received in reply the same standard excuses for not doing so. Can it be that today's Ministerial Council will prove an exception?

There is an understanding also as to what methods cannot be used to deal with these problems. These include methods involving "double standards", methods involving non-consensual procedures, and methods based on pressure, blackmail, threats and sanctions. Unfortunately, today's statements by a number of delegations of countries that actively employ precisely these methods against those who have the audacity to defend their own independent position eloquently demonstrate that the present Ministerial Council will hardly prove to be that kind of exception.

But without solutions of the kind that I am talking about our Organization will be like a ship without a rudder and without sails. Without a Charter, without the strengthening of its legal framework, without clear-cut rules governing the work of the OSCE and its institutions, without a proper balance in the work of its three dimensions, without balance as regards geopolitical priorities, and with a chairmanship that, instead of playing the role of an honest broker, follows obediently the position of a single group of countries, our Organization will

lose the chance to become the forum for a single and indivisible Europe and, accordingly, its *raison d'être*, the very reason for its existence. Belarus would not like to see that happen.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairperson, I should like to speak out in favour of Switzerland assuming the chairmanship of our Organization in 2014 and of Serbia doing so in 2015.

I should also like to sincerely thank the Lithuanian authorities for their hospitality and the citizens of Vilnius for the patience they have shown in the face of our movements throughout the city in connection with the holding of meetings by the ministers.

Thank you for your attention.