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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement Delivered

by

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of Malta to the OSCE

At the 15th OSCE Ministerial Council

Madrid, 29 – 30 November 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Colleagues,

At the outset I want to express the gratitude and appreciation of my delegation for the generous hospitality extended to us by our Spanish hosts in this beautiful city of Madrid for our 15th Session of the OSCE Ministerial Council.

I would also like to thank you Mr. Chairman for the committed and professional manner in which Spain has chaired this Organization during this last year — it has set new standards in transparency through comprehensive consultation. In so doing, Spain has further strengthened the common sense of ownership of the OSCE.

Malta has already aligned itself with the statement delivered by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Chairman,

It is Malta's strong belief that the role of the OSCE should not be diminished — on the contrary, we need more OSCE to consolidate democracy in every corner of our region; to combat the shame of trafficking in Human Beings; to relegate to history the conflicts that continue to persist well into the new millennium; to ultimately give to our peoples what should be the norm — peace, security and well being. The successes that we have been able to achieve through the OSCE should encourage us to continue working hard in this direction.

Malta has maintained, since the very inception of the then CSCE, that the security and peace of the OSCE area are intimately linked with that of its adjacent regions. This concept has today become a basic principle of our Organization. It is, therefore, with a sense of conviction that we support increased engagement of the OSCE with Partner States, including with Afghanistan. It was also this conviction - that the OSCE Partners for Cooperation are much more than simple observers but true and needed associates - that urged us to support the Chair's initiative to bring the Partners alongside Participating States' delegations in the Permanent Council and in other OSCE events.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the years, Malta has sought to underscore the importance of the Mediterranean to security in Europe. Malta believes that the OSCE should increasingly interact with the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation on issues of common interest and common concern such as terrorism, environmental security, trafficking in human beings, tolerance and migration. We should be in no doubt that non-involvement of our Mediterranean Partners in issues of common concern will clearly fail our security. In this respect, we welcome the proposal for the establishment of a Partnership Fund which we believe will facilitate this involvement. We believe that the time has come for the adoption of an appropriate decision in this regard.

At the same time, while we support consolidation of the relationship between the OSCE and the Partners for Cooperation, Malta continues to maintain that the OSCE should remain prepared to become engaged with other prospective candidates for OSCE Partnership and should reach out to other countries whose partnership with this Organization would be of mutual benefit.

Mr. Chairman,

The value added of the OSCE is precisely its perspective of a comprehensive approach to security – this is the fine thread that weaves together the three dimensions of our organization. It is within this perspective, therefore, that the OSCE has both the right and the duty to be involved in migration issues and more specifically, also in combating illegal migration. In this regard, we welcome the recent OSCE workshop held in Madrid on travel document security for Mediterranean Participating States and Mediterranean Partner Countries.

The OSCE, we maintain, has to further advance its work on this issue. As discussed in this year's OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, desertification, land degradation, lack of water resources and soil contamination clearly can have implications for our common security and could be factors increasing pressure on people to move across borders. In so doing, it could very possibly prompt a black-market for criminal gangs to smuggle and traffic human beings.

Mr. Chairman,

This year we hope to adopt the Convention on the legal personality of the OSCE – a decision which will further strengthen our Organization by granting it valued legal tools and protection. At the same time, we remain open to the concept of a Charter for the OSCE as long as such a Charter would not erode in any way our valuable commitments.

Our OSCE acquis was drafted with a very specific aim in mind — to consolidate and protect democracy in every part of our region. The commitments have been tried and tested and have unfailingly proved themselves. They deserve special support. Malta strongly upholds the sterling work done by ODIHR in its Election Observation Missions which have become the yardstick of free and fair elections. And within this perspective, therefore, the autonomy of ODIHR is a vital element in sustaining credibility and objectivity of election observation Missions.

The OSCE Field Missions are likewise precious – they are the human face of the OSCE; they nurse at grass-root levels, our democratic values and aspirations. Our Field Missions are the value added of the OSCE – they rightly claim expertise in institution building, in the fostering of media plurality, in combating trafficking, in promoting rule of law and in all other areas, without which there cannot be the normality of life. It is therefore clear that the OSCE has a role to play in Kosovo, regardless of its future status.

Mr. Chairman,

Much discussion has taken place on the future Chairmanships of this Organization. Malta commends the Spanish Chair's efforts to find an appropriate compromise and hopes that it will be possible to reach agreement at this Ministerial acceptable to all those concerned.

Mr. Chairman,

Malta believes that the OSCE can continue to play an important role to resolve the so-called Frozen Conflicts. In this regard, we believe that a renewed effort is needed to bring peace and stability to this region. The fulfilment of the Istanbul Commitments continues to be an important part of this endeavour.

Combating terrorism remains a common priority. I commend the work done by the OSCE in this area throughout this year. We have to constantly be on guard and remind ourselves, also, that human rights and rule of law must not be allowed to become the collateral damage of our common fight to eliminate the threat of terrorism.

Within this perspective, the need to promote tolerance and dialogue among civilizations assume particular relevance and importance — we in Europe know well enough of the atrocities that racism and xenophobia can bring. This is not mere history but actual facts of what could happen if we fail in our mission to combat intolerance and discrimination in our region. In this respect I commend the initiatives of the OSCE and of the Chairmanship in this sphere.

Mr. Chairman,

Before concluding, I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the quiet but no less effective role played by all OSCE Institutions, by the Secretary General and the Secretariat, in the pursuit of our common objectives and to express the appreciation of this delegation for their professional and dedicated work.

Allow me also to wish Finland all the very best for its Chairmanship of the OSCE during 2008. We are certain that as the Chairmanship moves from the South to the North — from Spain to Finland — we will continue to build on what has been achieved so far. Malta looks forward to cooperating closely with the Finnish Chairmanship and with the OSCE throughout the coming year.

I thank you.