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**STATEMENT BY MR. BERNARD KOUCHNER,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS OF FRANCE,
AT THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Madrid, 29 November 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary General,
Mr. President of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Ladies and Gentlemen, Ministers and dear colleagues,

Allow me first to thank you, Mr. Chairman — dear Miguel — for your warm welcome, and above all to congratulate you on the results obtained during your chairmanship.

The OSCE is, for France, a perfect place for reflection, dialogue and action. At a time when a number of disquieting subjects are casting shadows on the European horizon, we are fully conscious of the importance and relevance of the OSCE.

The OSCE retains a profoundly political vocation. It remains the only institution in which all the countries of Europe and Central Asia, as well as the United States and Canada, are able to engage in dialogue on all the subjects of concern to them. It is a unique model of co-operation. We must defend it and promote it, without lapsing again into the logic of political blocs, because its mandate reflects a basic concept of security and co-operation in which the fate of individual human beings is just as important as relations between States — I would say even more important. We must therefore reaffirm our Organization's vocation even though it is sometimes contested.

In order to ensure its efficacy, the OSCE must at last be endowed with legal personality. France is in favour of this. We must move ahead on this subject and at the same time pursue complementary discussions on the draft charter. The OSCE must have the financial and human resources required for its operations. The Secretary General, whose work I deeply respect, must, in particular, have the means to carry out his missions.

This strengthening of the OSCE is indispensable in view of the challenges the Organization has to confront. Let me briefly mention three of these.

The first is democracy and human rights. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is a symbol of the OSCE's efforts in this area. Its autonomy constitutes its strength, and that autonomy must be maintained. France will continue to support the ODIHR and its Director in carrying out their activities. And we hope that the ODIHR will be invited to observe the next elections held in the OSCE area, pursuant to a practice which has demonstrated its value.

The OSCE is at the forefront of the battle against intolerance and all forms of discrimination. It must maintain this position even more forcefully in protecting defenders of human rights and of the rights of NGOs. It is altogether regrettable that we were unable to adopt a Ministerial Council decision on human rights defenders. Altogether regrettable.

Among the subjects of concern to us at the moment, I should also mention conventional arms control in Europe. If confirmed, the announcement of Russia's suspension, dating from 12 December 2007, of its obligations under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe would be bad news for all of us. This is why we hope that the efforts deployed by various actors, among them France, will make it possible for us to avoid getting involved in an irreversible process which in time would mean the disappearance of a major instrument important for transparency and predictability.

Now I should like to turn for a moment to the question of Kosovo. I remain convinced that our Organization has a prominent role to play in the quest for solutions, for easing transitions and for ensuring the return to a strictly peaceful situation. The 56 countries represented here all have their own particular view of what the future of Kosovo should be. Each is thinking in terms of its own logic, and I am too well aware of the complexity of the situation to believe that a miraculous solution is in the offing. But I should like to draw your attention to the importance we all attribute to preserving, above all, civilian populations, and in this case the Serbian population of Kosovo. They need us: I hope that we will display complete unity in replying to them.

Owing to the fact that I was long involved in accompanying teams on the ground, I know very well the special importance of the role played by the OSCE mission in protecting the various elements of Kosovo's population. The work being done on site is remarkable. Whatever developments occur in relation to the status of Kosovo, the OSCE mandate should be renewed to guarantee the development of local democracy in 2008, as well as respect for human rights and the prevention of inter-ethnic tensions.

Alongside these hot issues, I could of course refer to Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia or Moldova where the role and the values of the OSCE are just as important. I could also refer to the struggle against trafficking in human beings or sexual exploitation of children, areas where the OSCE also plays a pioneering role.

Lastly, I could pause to consider economic and environmental questions, to which the Spanish Chairmanship devoted such remarkable efforts. We hope that the subsequent Chairmanships — and I salute Finland here in particular — will continue this work, which is of benefit first and foremost to the countries of Central Asia.

I note also that one Central Asian country, namely Kazakhstan, is a candidate for the OSCE Chairmanship. I have no doubt that this aspiration to assume the Chairmanship of our Organization is inspired by a desire to defend its principles and values. I hope that the efforts of the Spanish Chairmanship to reach a compromise on the Chairmanships to follow will be crowned with success.

France, for its part, will continue its firm commitment to serving an OSCE which brings democratic values and efficiency to the service of people throughout the world. It is in the name of this demanding vision of our Organization that I intend to mobilize the

European Union, since France, after Slovenia, will be assuming the Presidency in 2008. I know that these feelings are shared by the incoming Finnish Chairmanship, to which France will obviously give its full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman — dear Miguel — for your unfailing commitment to the OSCE. With you, and through the decisions we are going to take during this Ministerial Council meeting, our Organization is performing its role in the service of our fellow citizens and the democratic values which we all share. This is a fundamental requirement.

I was very pleased to hear the thoughts put forward by the President of the European Union and by Madame Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must now speak very frankly to each other. Tensions have returned. Europe has entered into a period of disquiet. This is a painful surprise, but the evidence is there: the hopes that were born among us 15 years ago are vacillating today. We didn't speak to each other this way just a short time ago; we had warmer, more fraternal conversations. What has happened in the meantime? All of us bear some share of responsibility. France is not accusing anyone for it bears its own share of responsibility. Altogether, let us be careful to avoid misunderstandings so that we don't go back 15 years. The time has come: let us get a grip on ourselves again!