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OSCE Ministerial Council, Madrid, 29/30 November 2007
Statement on behalf of Ireland by Mr. Dick Roche, T.D.,
Minister of State for European Affairs

Mr. Chairman,

May I begin by thanking our colleague, Foreign Minister Moratinos, for the efficient way in which he and his team have organised this conference and for the warmth of the hospitality that has been extended to us.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement made by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

Ireland sees the unique spread of OSCE responsibilities, extending from the fight against terrorism to environmental security, as a seamless web. In the final analysis the measure of the organisation's success or failure is its impact on the lives of citizens. This impact is a measure of the implementation of the commitments, which we have voluntarily undertaken. These are not merely aspirational. They are political commitments for which we, as representatives of government, have responsibility. As an active member of the Human Security Network Ireland attaches special importance to the human dimension of OSCE work and will continue to promote the idea of Human Security within OSCE during 2008, when we shall assume the Chair of the Network

It has rightly been said that the methodology of Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights represents the gold standard in election monitoring. The fact that it will not be possible for ODIHR to monitor the elections in the Russian Federation on 2 December must be a cause of profound regret to all participating States. It is important that the Copenhagen commitments on election monitoring are honoured to the full in the spirit as much as in the letter. The monitoring and certification of elections by ODIHR is a benefit of OSCE membership and not a burden unfairly imposed on some participating States. We hope that what has happened with regard to the election on 2 December will not become a precedent. We hope in particular that it will be possible for ODIHR to monitor the Russian presidential election in March 2008 in accordance with its well established methodology.

A number of participating States have criticised ODIHR's focus on elections in the newer democracies and in response the Office has increased its attention to more established democracies. We were pleased that our general election on 24 May 2007 was observed by an ODIHR assessment team. Indeed my own constituency was one centre for the Offices detailed attention. This assessment was done by autonomous experts and on the



basis of objective criteria. We were pleased to receive a positive assessment. We will take careful note of suggestions made by ODIHR for technical and legislative improvements in our election process.

Ireland's experience of ODIHR confirms our sense of its objectivity and professionalism. In elections, as in other areas covered by OSCE commitments, it is important that governments should not be the sole judges of their own performance. No person can be a fully credible judge in his own case: the same is true for Governments.

Mr. Chairman,

While greatly valuing the election work of ODIHR, it is important not to lose sight of the very important work also done by that Office in the areas of democracy and human rights. Ireland's support for this work is well known and will continue.

We also value highly the work of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media and support the activities of his office. Ireland welcomes the appointment of former Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek as High Commissioner on National Minorities. I am pleased to be able to announce that Ireland has committed itself to support a programme in the area of conflict prevention over the next three years, which will allow national minorities in a number of OSCE states to participate more fully in the political and administrative life of their respective countries.

Another area which Ireland believes to be of great importance is the dialogue between governments and NGOs at the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. This provides an opportunity for Governments to receive feedback on their performance in meeting OSCE commitments. Any change in this here would have to be very carefully considered and in Ireland's view could only aim at broader and more widely representative participation.

Together with NGOs, human rights defenders including politicians, political activists, trade unionists, journalists and lawyers, have a vital role to play in the consolidation of democracy. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has drawn our attention to the high price paid by many journalists for their efforts to promote and defend human and political rights. As part of our effort to advance human rights internationally, Ireland pays particular attention to the treatment of human rights defenders and assists organisations which



monitor their position. We therefore regard the protection of human rights defenders as a priority for the OSCE and will continue to promote decisions recognising that fact.

The ministerial conferences, which took place in Bucharest and Cordoba during 2007, signalled in the clearest way our organisation's rejection of racism, xenophobia, religious discrimination, and other forms of intolerance. We would like to see the work of the conferences carried forward in 2008. It is Ireland's view that human rights are indivisible and that there can be no hierarchy among victims. We can nonetheless see the value of a focus on specific aspects of intolerance and salute the useful work done by the three personal representatives of the Chairman in Office.

Ireland is closely following political developments in Kosovo, and we are playing a positive and active role there through our substantial commitment to KFOR military presence, where our troops command Task Force Centre, covering Pristina and the surrounding area. We strongly support the current Troika-led talks process and urge all sides to engage with this process in a constructive spirit of goodwill during the period remaining between now and the conclusion on 10 December. The OSCE Mission does important work on the ground and it is important that this continue.

Ireland welcomes the closure earlier this month of the one remaining Russian base in Georgia and looks forward to implementation of the remaining outstanding commitments given at the Istanbul Summit in 1999. The continuing unresolved conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and the Nagorno Karabakh region are a reproach to the OSCE and deserve our full attention. We hope that the discussions which are under way regarding the future of the CFE Treaty will lead to a positive outcome.

Mr. Chairman, we can never take peace and progress for granted. The OSCE continues to be a vital element in the international infrastructure that enables us to build better lives for all. I would like to congratulate you once again on a very successful Chairmanship. I would like to wish the very best to our Finnish colleagues in the difficult task which they are taking on and to assure them of Ireland's co-operation and support