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**ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC,
H.E. JIRI SCHNEIDER,
AT THE OSCE MINISTERIAL MEETING, Dublin, 6 December 2012**

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, on behalf of the Czech Republic, I would like to thank the Irish chairmanship for hosting this year's OSCE Ministerial, for the tremendous effort during this year and for all the work done. And I would like to warmly welcome Mongolia as the new participating State.

My country profited from existence of CSCE/OSCE. Soon after Helsinki Final Act was signed, Czech civil society formulated now famous Charter 77 in support of its conclusions and called the Czechoslovakian government accountable to implement it. One of the authors, Václav Havel, was then imprisoned. I would like to thank the Dutch foreign minister Timmermans for mentioning his name. The memory of the sacrifices people made to be free is one of the reasons why the Czech Republic supports and will support the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act - from the maintenance of peace and security to the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The comprehensive concept of security is the core of our Organization and it makes the OSCE unique.

Unfortunately, in some Participating States we are still witnessing human rights violations and setbacks for democratic institutions. We have noticed restrictions on the exercise of fundamental freedoms, aiming at limiting the scope for freedom of assembly, limitations and restrictions on the work of NGOs, curtailing the freedom of the Internet. In some participating States, there are still political prisoners. Quite often we may hear about prosecutions with clear political motivations and disrespect for the rule of law. In some participating states, conduct of elections in 2012 constituted obvious step backwards. And subsequent accusations of ODIHR by the respective states have been symptomatic of today's OSCE condition and atmosphere.

In this context I would like to stress that the Czech Republic highly values the important job ODIHR is doing. We praise its impartial work and we strongly oppose any attempts by participating states to restrict ODIHR's autonomy and its work. We would appreciate political support for ODIHR also from the Parliamentary Assembly.

We also praise the work of other OSCE institutions, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Mr Chairman,

OSCE's human dimension is at the forefront of our consideration. Last year in Vilnius, we were unable to adopt any decisions in this area due to opposition of a few countries. This year, the Irish Chairmanship put all its efforts to advance this agenda, and we commend its leadership on those issues. In the digital 21st century, the freedom that is becoming crucial to people all around the world is a freedom of Internet, freedom online. We would like the OSCE to reflect this fact in its deliberations.

One of the highlights of the OSCE Ministerial are in our view meetings with civil society representatives and NGOs from across the region. They are an excellent opportunity to discuss human rights challenges and ways to ensure that people can live in dignity, not in oppression like "The Protagonist" in Samuel Beckett's play "Catastrophe" which was dedicated to then imprisoned Czech dissident Václav Havel.

Mr. Chairman,

We regret that we have not seen much progress in the resolution of existing conflicts in the OSCE area. The protracted conflicts are one of the main factors that indisputably limit the ability of OSCE to make progress in several other fields, including those that may not be considered at first glance as interlinked.

To conclude: The OSCE needs new impetus for its work but it also needs to recall the basic principles it was founded on. The upcoming anniversary of Helsinki Final Act is a great opportunity to do so. Today's "Helsinki+40" decision turns our attention to key issues, such as implementation of existing commitments, in particular in human dimension, solution to existing conflicts, revitalizing arms control and confidence building, and it helps to bring coherence to the work of the three upcoming OSCE Chairmanships.

Mr. Chairman, I wish every success to the incoming Ukrainian Chairmanship.
Thank you.