

**Statement by the Head of the EU Delegation,
High Representative of the Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Catherine Ashton**

**To the OSCE Ministerial Council
Dublin, 6 December 2012**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure being here in Dublin. I would like to thank the Irish Chairmanship-in-Office for hosting the meeting and congratulate it, and you personally, Eamon, for your excellent leadership of the OSCE throughout the year, which has been greatly appreciated.

Let me also say how pleased I am to see the Foreign Minister of Mongolia taking his place among the members of the Organisation.

Mr Chairman, the EU is a staunch supporter of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security and we are engaged as an active partner across the OSCE region.

Last week, I visited Central Asia, which is a good example. Today, the EU cooperates closely with our Central Asia partners to enhance security in the region. We are establishing a High Level Security Dialogue. We are discussing how to ensure that the use and management of natural resources, such as water, energy, can become sources of cooperation rather than tension. We are addressing issues together relating to the rule of law and human rights without which long-term stability is impossible. And in my meetings last week we confirmed our common interest to promote a secure Afghanistan for the future in a stable and prosperous region. And in this we will continue to work closely with the OSCE and its participating States.

We are also of course deeply engaged in the Eastern Partnership countries and well advanced in the negotiations of Agreements that express our commitment to the political association and economic integration of our partners in the region with the European Union. Our relationship is underpinned by the common values of freedom, democracy and human rights - values shared within the OSCE.

And in that context, the EU is also ready to deepen its relationship with Belarus provided Belarus takes significant steps towards respecting the principles of democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Mr Chairman, as you have indicated, the protracted conflicts continue to pose a serious threat to stability of the OSCE region. The conflicts in Georgia, in the Republic of Moldova, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are costly, both politically and economically. And they also put limitations on international cooperation.

We continue to play a key role in the resolution of these conflicts, by co-chairing the Geneva talks and participating in the “5+2” negotiations on Transnistria. Mr Chairman, the time has come in the 5+2 negotiations for the parties to agree on the basic principles for a future settlement. We support confidence building measures to help the political processes in each of the conflicts. Beyond this, our contribution to conflict settlement is to provide long term perspectives for the region by supporting democratisation and economic integration. We highly value the efforts of the OSCE to achieve progress in the resolution of conflicts and are ready to intensify our cooperation on this.

We also continue to be closely engaged with the Western Balkans. During my recent trip with Secretary Clinton, I stressed our commitment to the European perspective of the entire region. But, ultimately, consolidating stability and ensuring progress remains the responsibility of the leadership.

As you know, I am personally committed to facilitating the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina to normalise their relations in order to secure the European future of both. I have also expressed, and do so again, my support for the European perspective of a united and sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina. But more work needs be done.

Mr Chairman, the European Union strongly supports the OSCE, which is a key forum of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security. I highly value the work done by OSCE field operations and autonomous institutions. They provide support to the participating States in the implementation of their commitments. I believe, the OSCE should continue to make the best use of these assets. To take one example, the work of ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) continues to be instrumental in helping states improve electoral standards throughout the OSCE region.

I would like to underline, too, the fundamental importance of common values. Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are at the heart of the EU’s

foreign policy. The EU has a Human Rights Strategy and an EU Special Representative for Human Rights.

Achieving more progress in the full implementation of the OSCE commitments in the Human Dimension remains an important priority for us. Freedom of expression, online and offline, safety of journalists, freedom of assembly and association, are current priorities. And there should be no going back on commitments already made.

The commitments in the OSCE's politico-military dimension remain an important stabilising factor on our continent. We all have an interest in continuing to promote confidence and security building measures as well as renewed efforts towards conventional arms control. We also need to develop the OSCE's capacity to address transnational threats, and I hope that this meeting will find agreement to take forward work in the OSCE on counter-terrorism. Cyber security is another area that is becoming increasingly important and the EU is developing a strategy in this field. I believe, establishing a set of confidence building measures in the OSCE on cyber security would be an important step forward. I would also want to highlight our strong support for the implementation within the OSCE of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security where we are ready to share experience and drive work forward.

The Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter have enabled the OSCE to build up a comprehensive set of shared norms, principles and commitments which have shaped the continent of today. Now we need to build on the work done at Astana to ensure the OSCE continues to play an important role in the decades to come. And that is why a decision on the Helsinki+40 process at this meeting will be important.

Mr Chairman, we all have a strong interest in showing this Ministerial meeting here in Dublin is a success. We look forward to working with Ukraine across all dimensions of the OSCE and would in particular like to encourage Ukraine to use its Chairmanship to advance the settlement of the Transnistria conflict.

The next three years, we believe, will be a defining period for the OSCE. We all have a responsibility to our citizens to promote the objectives and values it holds. We want to see that the OSCE remains a robust pillar in Europe's security architecture. And you can count on the European Union to play its part.