

**Statement by the Head of the EU Delegation, Ms Helga Schmid, Deputy
Secretary General of the European External Action Service**

To the OSCE Ministerial Council

Vilnius, 6 December 2011

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am delighted to be here in Vilnius. I thank the Lithuanian Chairmanship-in-Office and the OSCE Secretary General for preparing this meeting.
- For the European Union, the role of the OSCE remains essential for our security. Its shared values and principles, its broad membership and its comprehensive approach to European security are key assets. The European Union remains a strong supporter of the OSCE.
- The OSCE needs to be able to respond to the evolving security threats emanating from within and outside the OSCE area, from cyber attacks and international terrorism to the trafficking of human beings and drugs.
- Afghanistan is a case in point. We discussed this yesterday in Bonn. The work done by the OSCE in Central Asia is a key contribution, which we fully support.
- The OSCE's work in Central Asia is also a very good example of close and effective EU-OSCE co-operation, notably in the field.
- The European Union wants the OSCE as a close and effective partner, and fully supports the proposals of the Secretary General to strengthen the OSCE's

response capacity throughout the conflict cycle, especially in early warning and early action in response to emerging conflicts.

- I would like to underline the success of the EU's monitoring presence on the ground in Georgia and of the Geneva talks, which are co-chaired by the EU, the OSCE and the UN. Let me stress the importance of sustained engagement by all sides in these talks also in the future.
- I would also like to convey our concern about the lack of progress in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. A further escalation of tensions would have dramatic consequences for the entire region. The European Union will therefore step up its engagement and support for the work of the Minsk Group Co-chairs.
- Let me also welcome the resumption of the official 5+2 talks on Transnistria last week here in Vilnius. As a participant to these talks, the European Union will do its utmost to take the settlement process forward.
- The European Union also wants the OSCE to be a pillar of European security in the field of conventional arms control. To achieve this, we need greater transparency and predictability, and a modernised Vienna Document.
- Finally, and most importantly, I would like to underline the fundamental importance of the human dimension of the OSCE for the European Union.
- We fully support the work of ODIHR in observing elections throughout the OSCE area. This work is more important than ever. We commend the assessment presented yesterday by OSCE / ODIHR of the elections to the State Duma of the Russian Federation. Their recommendations should be duly implemented!

- The OSCE also needs to be able to respond to new challenges and negative trends related to the safety of journalists and limitations to the freedom of expression in digital media. Let me be clear – there should be no special rules for digital media. Fundamental freedoms apply to all forms of expression.
- The stronger we stand by these fundamental values, the stronger the OSCE will be. These values were at the origin of this co-operation in Helsinki, and they will carry this organisation into the future.
- We regret, of course, when these values are not upheld in the OSCE area, especially fundamental democratic norms. As said by Hillary Clinton earlier, we have in this regard particular concerns about the situation in Belarus.
- With the democratic transformations on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean, OSCE participating States have every reason not only to strengthen their links with Partners for Cooperation, but also to find inspiration in these events to redouble their own reform efforts and their commitment to open and democratic societies. In this respect, let me underline the importance of reaching out to and supporting civil society. This remains a key priority for the EU.
- Let me conclude by welcoming Mongolia's wish to become a participating State of the OSCE and by fully supporting the incoming Irish Presidency. We look forward to working closely with them next year.

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