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Italian Presidency of the European Union

11th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Maastricht, 1-2 December 2002:

Statement by Foreign Minister Frattini on behalf of the European Union

"Mister Chairman, Mister Secretary General, Dear Colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the European Union at this Ministerial Council, a meeting of particular relevance for the future of this Organisation. The Member States of the Union strongly believe in the added value of the OSCE. They have contributed to its work and intend to continue to do so. Therefore, it is essential that today we do our utmost to overcome the differences and ensure a successful outcome of our meeting.

The significance of this meeting is well reflected in the Document on the Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the 21st Century. It identifies the role the OSCE can play across all three dimensions, in close collaboration with other international organisations.

In the same vein, we should strive to work more closely with OSCE Partners for Co-operation to prevent and combat threats.

Our countries face threats which are diverse, less visible and less predictable. Among those, terrorism is the most heinous. The EU recognises the importance of the work done by the OSCE in this field.

Nowadays, more than ever, the OSCE comprehensive approach to security clearly shows its effectiveness. Countering threats only in the traditional frame of hard security is not sufficient. In an integrated world characterised by closer economic as well as cultural interaction and yet, sometimes, by intolerance and ethnic tensions, it is necessary to tackle the context in which threats are generated to achieve real and sustainable reconciliation.

OSCE's role in this process is crucial. The Organisation can and must contribute to strengthening respect for human rights, democratic institutions, the rule of law. It must fight all the phenomena of intolerance and discrimination.

Recent history has proven that this Organisation - in co-operation with other components of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture - can make a great contribution. The European Union - which has just approved a document on the "growing partnership" between the EU and the OSCE and on the modalities to implement it - is well aware that it can rely on this Organisation; in turn, the OSCE knows that it can count on the sustained support of the EU.

Today's meeting will take decisions that will improve the efficacy of this Organisation. We expect from it more concrete results, especially with respect to the resolution of the so called "frozen conflicts": the credibility of the Organisation depends on that. The European Union has an interest in their solution and stands ready to provide its support to this end.

The European Union notes with satisfaction the peaceful outcome to the political crisis in Georgia and we welcome the presence here, today, of the Acting Georgian President, Mrs. Nino Burdjanadze. I would also like to thank Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Ivanov for his contribution. The European Union calls on all political actors to continue to show restraint and to refrain from the use of force in the testing times ahead. The European Union stands ready, together with other actors and taking into account the particular role of the OSCE, to assist Georgia in the preparation and conduct of the announced elections.

The European Union welcomes and supports President Voronin's and the Moldovan Government's wish to reach a solution to the Transdnistrian problem in close co-operation with the international community, in particular the OSCE. We remain strongly committed to making a positive contribution towards facilitating a settlement within the OSCE framework and to supporting subsequent settlement consolidation and reconstruction.

We should also like to re-emphasise our full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republics of Georgia and Moldova.

The European Union would like to express its disappointment that more progress has not yet been made with regard to the fulfilment of the commitments which Russia accepted at Istanbul in 1999. It is Russia's responsibility to honour these commitments.

The EU is also concerned that, despite the constructive relations established between the Belarusian authorities and the OSCE office in Minsk, the conditions in which civil society operates have further deteriorated, especially for the media and NGOs. We urge the Belarusian government to comply fully with OSCE principles and commitments, with respect to protection of human rights, democratisation of institutions and development of civil society, and to co-operate with confidence with the OSCE office, especially in the field of human dimension.

The EU would like to highlight the continuing and valuable role which the OSCE plays in the West Balkans region, consolidating the region's security and stability and reinforcing and complementing the messages of the Thessaloniki European Council.

The European Union encourages the OSCE to continue to develop its work in Central Asia strengthening democracy, the rule of law and human rights. In this context, we would like to commend the role of President Ahtisaari.

We recognise and appreciate the continuous efforts of the Chairmanship to come to a proper implementation of an

understanding with the Russian Federation on a possible future role of the OSCE in Chechnya. Unfortunately, a result has not yet been achieved. We hope that co-operation with the OSCE on this issue will be resumed soon.

Let me also recall that we have made steps towards a new balance between the various dimensions of the concept of "comprehensive security". This will hopefully reinforce our cohesion and sense of ownership in this Organisation.

The European Union welcomes the new strategy document on the economic and environmental dimension, in particular the agreement among the 55 on the importance of good governance.

The OSCE has proven its effectiveness in assisting Participating States through its Institutions and Field Operations: the keyword of this activity has always been co-operation and it is in this vein that the EU has always perceived the role of the OSCE.

Before concluding, I would like to stress once again the unique role this Organisation plays in promoting co-operation among Participating States in all dimensions related to security. The entire OSCE community can benefit from a framework where the pan-European consensus can be built under the common denominator of shared standards of democracy, respect for human rights and common political sense of purpose.

Finally, I would like to warmly thank Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and his staff for their most efficient work, the Dutch Authorities for the perfect organisation of this meeting and for their warm hospitality. I would like also to express my best wishes to the incoming Chairman-in-Office, our colleague Solomon Passy, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria.

The Acceding and the Associated Countries to the European Union align themselves with this statement.

Thank you, Mister Chairman."