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MALTA

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Walter BALZAN ,
Head of the Delegation of MALTA to the OSCE Ministerial Council
Meeting, Sofia
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Sofia, Bulgaria

6th December, 2004

**Mr. Chairman
Distinguished colleagues**

At the outset, may I express my country's sincere gratitude for the generous hospitality and organisational qualities of our Bulgarian hosts. Malta commends Bulgaria's arduous dedication demonstrated throughout its Chairmanship in Office. In the same vein, Malta welcomes Slovenia as the incoming Chair, convinced that its leadership will be equally skilful and as effective.

Mr. Chairman

The international community remains timorous that terrorist acts may happen where and when they are least expected. No state is immune or anyone exempt from this scourge of the 21st century. Human security has never been as threatened or as vulnerable as innocent civilians become its daily sacrificial lambs. Terrorism is a crime against humanity. Malta remains resolute in combating the continuing terrorist threat relentlessly and comprehensively in an integrated approach through internal and international co-operation. At the same time, Malta remains equally determined that in so doing, respect for democracy and human rights should prevail, unconditionally.

Mr. Chairman

Apart from terrorism, the 'OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the 21st century', highlights inter-state and intra state conflicts, organised crime together with discrimination and intolerance as novel threats to security and stability. Of parallel importance, the Strategy underscores threats emanating from economic and environmental crises as well as threats of a politico-military nature. While they constitute the core security threats of the present age, it should be recognized that the OSCE has effectively laid down its future agenda in countering such threats within its two main Strategies. The OSCE would do well to remain seized of their respective inspiration, particularly with respect to core principles such as democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman.

The OSCE displayed foresight in identifying the far-reaching merits of tolerance and non-discrimination through the promotion of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue and the outright condemnation of all forms of intolerance. This culminated in the three OSCE conferences addressing the so-called 'intolerance cluster' held this year in Berlin, Paris and Brussels. Collectively, the outcome was a comprehensive condemnation of all forms of intolerance on the basis of religion, culture, ethnicity or gender. Malta welcomes the OSCE's decision to appoint three Personal Representatives of the CIO, each dealing with a specific, but integral part of a holistic approach and mandate and all collaborating within ODIHR to combat discrimination in all its forms and manifestations. In this respect, Malta welcomes

the offer of Spain to host a follow-up conference in Cordoba next year. Meanwhile, it remains fully committed to support all decisions and measures aimed at eliminating all forms of intolerance and discrimination, including against Christianity.

Mr. Chairman.

The essential quality of the OSCE as a regional organisation according to Chapter VIII of the UN Charter is – in our view – as relevant today as it was when originally conceived in 1992. The OSCE, bound to seek and promote the peaceful settlement of disputes within its area of application, should seek new and creative approaches that could stimulate the resolution of the so-called ‘frozen conflicts’. In this respect, while reaffirming its support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and Moldova, Malta calls on the OSCE, other international organisations and key regional players to spare no effort to draw the relevant parties to the respective negotiating tables and seek peaceful solutions to unsettled disputes. Meanwhile, Malta retains that the full implementation of the Istanbul commitments by all parties concerned, remains of the essence. Equally significant would be the OSCE’s continued efforts to seek an equitable resolution to the dispute on Nagorno-Karabakh and the continued promotion of conflict prevention, resolution and peace building activities of the OSCE – particularly through its field missions – in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and other areas of the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman,

Developments in the Ukraine captivate our collective attention. The OSCE looks forward to a positive outcome of the democratic process currently being exercised in the Ukraine, one which shall soundly reflect - and in no uncertain manner - Ukraine’s commitment to its OSCE principles, obligations and standards.

Mr. Chairman.

The OSCE Ministerial Council in Sofia marks the first for Malta as a member of the EU. Nevertheless, in both fora Malta’s basic political vocation remains identical. As has been the case for the last 30 years within the OSCE and from now on within the EU, Malta will continue to reaffirm its belief that security in the Mediterranean and security in Europe are intimately inter-linked and considerations on one cannot be detached or discussed in vacuum from the other.

Malta pioneered in raising this principle - and never ceased doing so - within the C/OSCE process. Situated right at the heart and thick of it, it becomes all the more clear now as we navigate in this era of increasing globalisation and free-trade zones. Being the cradle of the three main monotheistic civilisations – and with inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue so topical in this day and age – security in the Mediterranean is crucial for security in Europe, not merely because of geographical contiguity, but also for more sensitive trans-border issues which gained global focus

in recent years. These are testing times for the Mediterranean region, characterised on the one hand by praiseworthy initiatives to engage the main regional actors in much-needed and determined dialogue for better political, cultural, social and religious understanding, and on the other, unprecedented attempts at interrupting it. Nevertheless, the *un-intimidated will to dialogue*, coupled by the disposition to reach durable solutions, *should be made to prevail*, as all other alternatives can only undermine security in the Mediterranean, Europe and beyond.

Mr. Chairman.

In Sharm El Sheik last month, Malta elaborated on the phenomenon of illegal immigration – or so-called ‘boat people’ - affecting the Southern Mediterranean. Malta – as a transit country - has been suffering from this plight of human tragedy in recent years. By the end of October, over 1100 irregular immigrants landed on Maltese shores, of whom 700 reached our coasts during the summer months alone. With a population of just 400,000, these figures tax our resources and absorptive capacities to the limit. *The magnitude of the problem goes beyond Malta’s capacity to deal with it single-handedly, indefinitely.* In this context, Malta welcomes the intention of the in-coming Slovenian OSCE chair to address various aspects of migration and integration, including smuggling in migrants.

During the same OSCE Mediterranean Seminar, an interesting proposal calling on the OSCE to consider monitoring upcoming elections in Palestine was floated. Malta would welcome a positive OSCE response in the light of recommendations emerging from the report of the Informal Group of Friends on the implementation of PC Decision 571.

Mr. Chairman.

Next year marks the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 15th anniversary of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Throughout, this Organisation has prided itself with being a forum for political dialogue on an equal basis before and after the end of divisions in Europe. In so doing, it has defended its consensus rule and has provided an equal voice to all its members. This – essentially – should remain its *raison d’etre*.

Thank You.