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**STATEMENT BY  
MR. SERGEI V. LAVROV, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF  
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE TWELFTH MEETING OF  
THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Sofia, 7 December 2004

Mr. Chairman,  
Esteemed Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I should like to thank our Bulgarian hosts for the excellent organization of our meeting and for their successful chairmanship of the OSCE during 2004.

This has been a difficult year for all of us. Our countries have had to endure quite a few trying experiences. The most dramatic of these were associated with fresh attacks by international terrorists in Spain, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Russia, and also in a number of countries outside the boundaries of the OSCE. A particularly monstrous tragedy was the catastrophe in Beslan, where terror went beyond the furthest limits of baseness and cowardliness, directed as it was against innocent and defenceless children.

Today we are to adopt a declaration by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs condemning these acts of violence as well as a solid packet of concrete counter-terrorism decisions. We are in favour of further strengthening the counter-terrorism potential of the OSCE and expanding the collaboration of States in their efforts to counter contemporary threats.

The Forum for Security Co-operation performed useful work in the past year and has drafted for the Ministerial Council a number of practical decisions. Unfortunately, however, we have made little headway in the fundamental questions of ensuring genuine pan-European security, and this statement refers particularly to our failure to secure the entry into force of the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty). Russia, together with Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, has ratified this Agreement. Thus we have fulfilled all commitments relating to the CFE Treaty adopted at the Istanbul OSCE Summit Meeting in 1999. We call upon our other partners to do the same. We once again wish to propose considering adaptation of the Vienna Document 1999 of the Negotiations on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures to the new conditions prevailing today. We believe that the strengthening of security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region and of confidence among participating States would be well served by implementing our idea of holding a high-level seminar on military doctrines and defence policy in the OSCE area in the course of the coming spring.

As far as regional conflict situations are concerned, the impatient approach to these problems and their solution which we observe sometimes and the temptation to “cleave through them”, as it were, in a single stroke certainly do not represent the best way of doing things. In this way we run the risk of getting the opposite result and propelling the conflicts into a “hot” phase. The expert advice provided by the OSCE should strengthen, not debase or, worse still, undermine negotiation formats already under way.

The present tension in relations between the two sides in the Moldova conflict has come about largely because a real chance to achieve a decisive breakthrough in attempts to reach a settlement was missed last year — through no fault of our own. In the course of the year we have not heard one serious argument against the Kozak Memorandum, drawn up by common efforts of the request of the parties to the conflict themselves. A question which we repeated during the Russia-European Union summit in The Hague on 25 November 2004, namely what specifically it is about this Memorandum that does not suit a number of our partners and why the signing of a document already initialled by the two sides was thwarted, has remained without an answer. If it had not been for this disruption, the conflict would long since have been settled and the question of withdrawing the ammunition still remaining in Transdniestria would also have been resolved.

With regard to international guarantees underpinning this settlement, we are still prepared to sign, right now, the “Stability and Security Pact for the Republic of Moldova” in the form originally proposed by President Vladimir N. Voronin, on the understanding that it will enter into force immediately after a political settlement of the Transdniestrian problem has been reached as part of a package. However, the latest variations on the theme of a Ministerial Council declaration on this subject, which were introduced from outside and in an atmosphere of incomprehensible secrecy, represent an attempt to emasculate the content of the basic elements of the settlement and to exclude from the process one of the sides, an attempt which is in conflict with all the decisions already taken and indeed with plain common sense. The added value of such a declaration would be close to zero; indeed it might even have a minus sign. Russia will be guided strictly by the 2001 Agreement on Friendship and Co-operation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova, the legally binding provisions of which go well beyond the formulations found in the draft declaration. We see only one way out of this impasse, namely to abandon fruitless political manoeuvring aimed at introducing, quite artificially, new formats for the settlement and to convince the two sides of the necessity of engaging in common efforts with the three mediators — Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE — to find future arrangements that will ensure peaceful coexistence.

Only this kind of approach — namely to seek a settlement on the basis of agreements reached by the two opposing parties themselves — is fully in line with international practice. It is completely justified and applicable in the case of the conflict situations existing in Georgia, too.

However, we are scarcely likely to attain such agreements if from the high tribunes in Chisinau and Tbilisi the opponents in Tiraspol, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali continue to be called enemies and marionettes. This is a path leading to fresh demarcation, not to agreement.

Today what we need is not political slogans but concrete measures to improve the existing situation with regard to South Ossetia on the basis of the Sochi Agreements reached by Zurab Zhvania and Eduard Kokoity on 5 November this year. We expect from both sides

consistent steps towards implementation of the agreements designed to strengthen confidence between Tbilisi and Sukhumi, particularly in the economic sphere. For its part, Russia will do everything in its power to ensure that the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, is returned to a sound legal basis. The fruitlessness of efforts to define the status of Abkhazia artificially by coercion is obvious. We will not forget, by the way, the recommendations of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe regarding the importance of an autonomous status for Ajara. We should like to hear how our Georgian colleagues are planning to meet this recommendation. The point is that the practical liquidation of Ajarian autonomy is hardly conducive to confidence in Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian relations.

The OSCE's activities in the economic sphere, and indeed in other dimensions too, should help to promote collective analysis of the current problems confronting all participating States of the OSCE. We propose that a conference should be held in 2005 on energy security in the OSCE area, a conference that would discuss problems such as the development of international co-operation in the energy sector, the strengthening of overall security in relation to energy supplies and deliveries, and the promotion of efficient energy-saving measures.

The efforts being undertaken by the OSCE in the area known as the human dimension retain their significance. I should like to draw attention once more to the importance of protecting the rights of national minorities, which are being infringed in Latvia and Estonia. I might recall the important resolution on this subject which was adopted by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in July 2004, and also the recommendations of Mr. Rolf Ekéus, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

On the subject of the problems of minorities, we will also not lose sight of the commitments undertaken by Georgia 12 years ago when it joined the Council of Europe — to adopt a law on the return of the Meskhetian Turks to their historical homeland.

Next year, we will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. We believe the adoption by our Ministerial Council meeting of a Declaration on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the End of the World War II is extremely important for preserving the historical remembrance of the peoples of Europe and ensuring unity in the struggle against new threats and challenges.

At the same time, these key dates prompt us to consider the role of the OSCE itself. How is the Organization coping with its original mission as a forum for dialogue on the basis of equal rights and collective decision-making on the entire range of questions regarding European security? What kind of "added value" can it bring compared to the other formats in which we interact? The role and place of the OSCE in the multilateral co-operation architecture taking shape in the Euro-Atlantic area will depend on the answers to these questions. We need to do everything possible to ensure that our Organization does not find itself faced with a kind of identity crisis. Yet this danger does exist.

Unfortunately, it must be said that the comparative advantages of the OSCE are being eroded. We are all aware of the imbalances and "double standards" at issue here. The Organization is not only ceasing to be a forum uniting States and peoples but, on the contrary, is beginning to drive them apart. All of this does not help to increase confidence in the OSCE and in its usefulness.

Hence also, the concern expressed and the substantial number of proposals for correcting the situation made in the Declaration by the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States of 3 July 2004 and in their Appeal to OSCE colleagues on 15 September 2004. The Appeal contains a constructive concept for the development of the OSCE in the interests of all 55 participating States.

In our view, the future lies in the kind of OSCE that could genuinely help all participating States to solve common problems and would be ready to assist each of them in carrying out projects that are useful for them. The mechanisms of that kind of OSCE would help the participating States with their real needs in respect of development and co-operation and would work to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines on our continent. In that connection, it is important to understand that real unity in the pan-European process can be ensured only through recognition of and respect for diversity and due regard for the cultural, historical, national and other differences between our countries.

The OSCE is in need of comprehensive reform. I am certain that today hardly anyone doubts this. The Organization's work next year must focus on this most important task. We need real progress in optimizing the work of the Secretariat and the institutions, and in reorganizing the field missions so that they engage in specific project work geared to the requests of the host States.

In order to avoid the increasingly pernicious practice of applying "double standards" in the assessment of election processes, we need to devise a system of objective criteria to be applied throughout the OSCE area. We have been talking about this for four years now. In the absence of such criteria, election monitoring is not only ceasing to make sense but is also becoming an instrument of political manipulation and a destabilizing factor.

An integral part of any reform must be a restructuring of the system for financing the OSCE. As far as the scale of contributions is concerned, we need to apply the principle of the real ability of States to pay, in accordance with the United Nations method, and to improve the procedure for allocating extrabudgetary funds. We are convinced that we should not delay any further the settlement of this overdue issue. Without firm commitments in this regard we cannot approve the budget for 2005.

Our Organization retains its unique potential as a forum for bringing together States that have different geographical positions in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian areas and belong to various smaller organizations. It will depend on us ourselves alone whether or not we will be able to turn the OSCE into a genuinely effective collective mechanism to ensure the interests of all its members on the basis of consensus as a guarantee of equal rights and mutual respect or whether the OSCE will merely turn into a mechanical tool serving more limited structures.

It goes without saying that an important contribution to the achievement of this goal will be made by the future Slovenian chairmanship. We wish our colleagues in Ljubljana every success in that regard and trust that we will all support the Slovenian chairmanship in carrying out the important tasks involved in truly reforming the Organization.