

Statement by Ambassador Stefán Skjaldarson
Permanent Representative of Iceland to the OSCE
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ENGLISH only

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first thank you Mr. Chairman for the warm hospitality that you have extended to us here in Athens. We highly appreciate it.

The OSCE has played a significant role in the transformation of Europe from being divided by an Iron Curtain. It is an important venue for an open dialogue between us; the participating states and, it is based on the fundamental standards and values that we all share and must respect. It seems to me that the primary strength of the OSCE lies in its all-inclusive and comprehensive approach to security. We should continue to keep it on that track forward.

The European Security dialogue has great potential. The Greek Chairmanship has played an exceptionally constructive and proactive role in enhancing the dialogue by initiating the Corfu Process. The main objective of the Corfu process is to restore trust and confidence between the participating states leading to a more secure Europe. For this to succeed the Corfu agenda must address real security threats and challenges. We have agreed upon a very large body of norms, procedures, rules and regulations to serve as guidelines in the conduct of our relations. Nevertheless we continue to have diverging perceptions and different interpretations of established norms and rules. We also continue to have different perspectives and definitions of our interests. This and many other points relevant to the issue of strengthening confidence and trust we need to

address in particular in the context of shortcomings in implementing existing OSCE commitments in all three dimensions.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, I would like to focus on four aspects of the OSCE's work.

First, arms control and confidence building measures have been part and parcel of the security regime in Europe. They have provided transparency and predictability and thus facilitated political and military stability on the continent and beyond. This area is strongly supported by my Government and should remain a priority issue on the OSCE agenda

Second, we should put every effort into finding solutions to protracted and frozen conflicts. The field missions are one of the defining features of the OSCE. In this respect, an OSCE presence in Georgia is important for peace and stability in the region. We hope the Russian Federation will reconsider its position on this matter.

Third, free and fair elections are a cornerstone of every democracy. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR, has time and again demonstrated the relevance of its activities. Iceland has frequently participated in ODIHR's election monitoring missions in other OSCE states. Last spring it was our turn to receive an Election Assessment Mission to Iceland. The ODIHR's assessment of the Icelandic Parliamentary elections was most welcome and their report gave us valuable suggestions on how to improve our practice and legislation. This was evident in the Government Platform from last May, which pledges to amend the Elections Act, based on recommendations

made by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Proposed legislative amendments have already been submitted to the Icelandic Parliament. Last but not least, trafficking in human beings impedes the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms and constitutes a serious threat to the international community. No country can escape this scourge. We are all affected. This year, Iceland has had two widely publicized cases reminding us about the seriousness of the matter and the importance of international cooperation in addressing this crime.

The Government of Iceland has consistently been strengthening measures to combat human trafficking. Earlier this year we adopted a National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings and established a task force to ensure its successful implementation. We also passed a legislation criminalizing the purchase of prostitution services.

Iceland is determined to ratify the Palermo Protocol as well as the European Convention against Trafficking during the current legislative session of the Icelandic Parliament. We attach great importance to the work of the OSCE in this field and would have welcomed the adoption of a decision here in Athens on strengthening the OSCE's efforts in preventing trafficking.

Let me seize this opportunity to commend Ms. Eva Biaudet, the outgoing Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, for her tireless work and dedication. We have learned from her, that political vision and leadership is imperative to achieving success in eradicating the evil of human trafficking.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, allow me to congratulate you, on the leadership you and your team have shown throughout this year, both here in Athens and in Vienna. I would also like to extend Iceland's best wishes to the incoming Kazakh Chairman-in-Office.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.