

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

Helsinki, 5 December 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to associate myself with the words of gratitude addressed to the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Mr. Alexander Stubb, and to all his team along with the staff of the OSCE Secretariat for the fine organization of our ministerial meeting and the tireless efforts they have made in an attempt to make fuller use of the solid potential given to our Organization by its founding fathers.

I believe that it will not come as a big revelation if I say that in recent years the OSCE has been at a kind of crossroads. The choice of direction in the future will determine the fate of the Organization — whether it will ultimately be needed or not. There are those who wish to preserve everything as it was in the 1990s. In other words, a group of countries that claim to be the most advanced in terms of civilization determine and control the parameters of movement for the others. For this reason, they demand that all the institutions and mechanisms of the Organization remain untouched as a kind of gold standard. In the meantime, history has shown that if these standards are not in keeping with the requirements of the time, then the teacher of life, as the ancient Greeks called history, will in the best case consign them to an archive or a museum. And this is not a question of someone's desires or will — this is an objective process.

It is clear to us that the OSCE in its present form is not dealing with its principal task, namely that of ensuring equal and indivisible security for all. Whereas in the early 1990s the Organization was able to put a stop to wars, now it is not in a position to prevent them. Unsanctioned use of force — in clear violation of the basic principles of the Helsinki Final Act — is something that many are not ashamed of. We might recall the 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 or the military attack on South Ossetia. Unfortunately, the OSCE was unable in either case to make a proper assessment based on the facts and existing commitments of the participating States.

Other areas of activity also give rise to doubts. We might ask ourselves why the majority of countries hosting OSCE missions want to get rid of them. The answer is obvious — the presence of the missions is interpreted as a sign of inequality. The same

applies to the monitoring of elections by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). And yet the equality of States is a fundamental Helsinki principle.

We need to eliminate these glaring contradictions to the spirit and the letter of Helsinki. We need to eliminate the visible and invisible dividing lines, all the more so in a situation that requires a real pooling of efforts on the part of all States to find answers to the challenges posed by globalization.

The Russian Federation does not want to see the OSCE fail. We are proposing that its agenda be filled with unifying and forward-looking items vital to the present and future prosperity of all the States that make up the Organization and of their citizens. It was in this spirit that we proposed that the OSCE be involved in the initiative put forward by President Dmitry Medvedev to establish a legally binding treaty on European security, which would permit the creation of a common area of collective security for all of the Euro-Atlantic States.

My statement at yesterday's meeting of the Heads of Delegation was devoted to this matter. The text has been distributed. I shall not repeat myself. I am grateful to all our colleagues for the genuine interest shown in this initiative. I should like to bring up just one aspect of the "added value" of our proposal. The fact is that the situation in the Euro-Atlantic area traditionally has a great impact on the situation in other regions of the world. The conclusion of a treaty on European security will also be of positive significance for the countries beyond the borders of the Euro-Atlantic zone. I am confident that by ensuring stability on a more solid basis in our region it will be possible to avoid the impression that we pose some kind of threat to our external partners. Furthermore, we shall provide them with a new and positive example of how civilized inter-State relations can be established in a broad and diverse area.

We shall continue to work on the treaty on European security, taking into account the proposals heard yesterday on the ways in which the OSCE might make a contribution to it.

An integral part of our proposals for the treaty is the restoration of the viability of the European conventional arms control regime. We are convinced that agreements in this area reflecting the changed realities would be in the interests of all the countries in the OSCE area, creating the basis for an appropriate level of predictability, confidence and security on the continent. We are in favour of returning arms control instruments to their original aim — greater security with fewer resources. If, however, they are examined only from the point of view of deriving unilateral advantages and resolving issues that have nothing to do with arms control, then the further erosion of the existing regimes will be inevitable.

Looking at the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty), the draft "package solution" on the basis of the so-called "parallel actions" to rescue the Treaty from the grave crisis that it finds itself in looks for the moment more like the exchange of a set of detailed Russian actions for some amorphous promises on the part of NATO. This imbalance needs to be eliminated by ensuring that all the elements of the "package" are specific so as to avoid different interpretations.

Russia takes the position that saving the CFE regime by rehabilitating the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty and adopting other measures to improve its viability should not be the exclusive prerogative of Moscow and Washington. Other participating States must also

have an opportunity to make their contribution. We welcome the ideas expressed by Germany in this connection.

An important part of the efforts to strengthen the politico-military component of security in Europe is the work of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC).

One positive asset of the Forum is its the evident reanimation of dialogue within it. There have been critical but useful discussions on the situation in the Caucasus, above all on the subject of the Georgian aggression against South Ossetia. We regret that our proposal to convene the NATO-Russia Council to discuss this situation made at the height of the war unleashed by Georgia was blocked — essentially by one delegation.

During the last two or three years, Russia has spoken of the danger of supplies of heavy weapons to Georgia and has drawn our partners' attention to the fact that these deliveries contravene the commitments undertaken by States within the OSCE. Now, after the most difficult lesson learned in August voices can once again be heard in some OSCE countries in favour of providing massive military assistance to Georgia and re-establishing its military potential as soon as possible. We once again call on everyone to take our warnings seriously and to abide strictly by the commitments laid down in the relevant OSCE documents. We shall continue to raise these questions, in the FSC and elsewhere.

We believe that the practice of frank discussions must be extended to a wider range of problems of both a local and pan-European nature.

In order for the Forum to make the contribution expected of it to the strengthening of European security, we need to conduct an unbiased survey of the existing norms and documents to see whether they are in keeping with the present realities. The elaboration of new confidence-building measures in the politico-military sphere is also extremely vital, and Russian proposals on these matters have been submitted to the Forum.

We hope that the decision we adopt today to enhance the work of the Forum will help things move in this direction.

Russia is an advocate of an active OSCE to counter international terrorism, which is a challenge that concerns us all. It was in our Organization that a civil society segment was added to the public-private partnership in this area. Together with a number of partners, we initiated the inclusion of measures to combat drug trafficking in the OSCE's political agenda. The decisions that we adopt at this meeting should make it possible to continue our joint work on these issues more effectively next year.

The OSCE could play a useful role in encouraging co-operation within the second, economic and environmental "basket". We must be realistic and not endeavour to set our Organization tasks that it cannot master or to compete with specialized structures. All proposals to include such new topics in the OSCE's agenda should be examined for the presence of corresponding "added value" and expert potential.

The commitments made within the OSCE in the human rights field are of abiding value. They apply to all participating States to the same degree. The protection of the rights of national minorities, the promotion of tolerance, especially in inter-ethnic relations, and the

inadmissibility of the glorification of Nazism and associated attempts to revise the history of Europe are particularly relevant today.

We should like to draw attention to one urgent humanitarian issue. The Georgian Government cut off the gas supply to South Ossetia some time ago. As winter approaches, it is hard not to interpret this as an act of inhumanity. We believe that the OSCE leadership and its institutions should take urgent measures to prevent the humanitarian disaster that could occur as a result of Tbilisi's actions.

We firmly believe that the deficient nature of the OSCE's institutional structure is having an ever greater impact on its effectiveness. It is important to finally come to an agreement on an OSCE charter, to extend the Rules of Procedure to the work of the executive structures, namely the institutions and field missions, and to bring civilized order to the organization of election observation and the participation of non-governmental organizations in OSCE meetings. We also need to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities of its field presences by analysing the way in which they implement paragraph 41 of the Charter for European Security and to revise the OSCE Staff Rules and Staff Regulations concerning the appointment of heads of field missions so as to make this procedure more transparent and in line with the choice of the host countries.

All of this would strengthen the rule of law in the activities of our Organization and its international character and ensure the equality of all participating States.

Recent events have made it necessary to look closely at the way information is circulated within the OSCE and the presence of "filters" that make it accessible only to some participating States. We are concerned at reports in the media that on the eve of the attack on South Ossetia OSCE observers reported on Tbilisi's preparations but their reports for some reason were not distributed to all the members of the Organization. This is absolutely unacceptable. We trust that the internal investigation into this matter will be seen through to the end.

Mr. Chairman,

According to its mandate, one of the tasks of the OSCE is to resolve regional conflicts. It is clear that their successful outcome could really help to strengthen security in the Euro-Atlantic area. But here too we must have uniform standards — we propose that a list of them be included in the treaty on European security. We welcome the progress made in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict following the meeting in Moscow of the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the President of Russia. There has also been genuine progress towards a Transdniestrian settlement. The agreement of the parties to the conflict is of key importance and needs to be promoted in every possible way. This also applies to the possible future work of the OSCE Mission to Georgia and the presence of OSCE observers in other districts in the South Caucasus.