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Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by acknowledging the numerous achievements of the Finnish Chairmanship-in-Office. And allow me to add my thanks, Mr. Chairman, for your hospitality, as we gather to take stock of what we have accomplished, and what still needs to be done.

I would also like to thank the outgoing member of the OSCE Troika, my dear friend Miguel Angel Moratinos for his notable efforts, and wish all success to Dora Bakoyannis in her capacity as the incoming Chairperson-in-office.

Mr. Chairman,

It is an honor and privilege to address the Sixteenth Ministerial Meeting of the OSCE in Helsinki, the city in which the noble foundations of our work as participating States was established in 1975.

The OSCE represents a unique forum—at once pan-European and Trans-Atlantic—in which participating States can coordinate their positions in the context of the broader European

security agenda.

Its fundamental merit has been the establishment of principles and values expressed in political commitments that keep serving as a multi-dimensional framework for relations amongst its participating States. Serbia will proudly and consistently continue to promote them in the conduct of our foreign and domestic policies.

Mr. Chairman,

This brings me to the fact that amongst participating States, the Republic of Serbia has the highest number of registered refugees and IDPs. More than 200,000 Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia have become citizens of Serbia, while another 74,000 remain registered refugees. Another 200,000 Serbs from Kosovo remain IDPs in northern and central Serbia.

I must underline that a sustainable and dignified solution to these issues cannot be found without full restitution of, or compensation for, seized or destroyed property.

The Republic of Serbia fully expects that the authorities in neighboring countries, such as Croatia, as well as those in our province of Kosovo, fulfill their obligations on these issues.

Mr. Chairman,

In pursuit of fuller regional cooperation, the Republic of Serbia has consistently advocated the strengthening of cooperation between the region's OSCE Missions.

The Palić, Ohrid and Sarajevo Processes are perfect examples of how the OSCE can assist countries to solve issues that are by their very nature regional in scope—and that, as such, require solutions that are *themselves* regional.

We do not believe that the Sarajevo Process—to which we attach particular importance—has been completed. This important regional question requires not only a regional answer, but also the continuing active involvement of the three international stakeholders to the Sarajevo Process: the UNHCR, the EU, and of course the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman,

I now turn to more geo-strategic considerations.

My country believes that the OSCE can and should position itself to better respond to the growing number of challenges we all face. This ought to include engagement at the Heads of State level.

Events of this past year in the OSCE space have made it clear that it is time for the participating States to engage each other in a frank and open dialogue about inclusive ways to bolster security in the 21st century. I believe it is our duty to forge ahead with ideas and proposals designed to strengthen the implementation of the basic principles of our Organization.

All constructive initiatives which aim to bring us closer to such an achievement are laudable, and should to be encouraged. We acknowledge, in particular, the commendable efforts of Presidents Medvedev and Sarkozy to take the lead in proposing concrete steps in the direction of improving European security within the framework of the OSCE.

The Republic of Serbia strongly supports the enhancement of dialogue. My country played a crucial role in advancing what began here, in this city, more than thirty years ago, by bridging often intractable positions before and during the First CSCE Follow-up Meeting that took place in Belgrade. Today, Serbia is again determined to play an active part in the modernization of the agenda of peace, security and cooperation in Europe.

Mr. Chairman,

2008 has been the hardest year of Serbia's political transition. Despite overwhelming odds, our democracy was strengthened, and our European perspective was advanced.

The reasons are myriad. But the strategic cause lies in the conscious choice we made to respond diplomatically, and with maximal restraint, to the direct assault on our sovereignty and

territorial integrity—in direct violation of our Constitution, the UN Charter, and the Helsinki Final Act, and against the will of the Security Council.

Mr. Chairman,

The way Serbia reacted to the February 17th unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic Albanian authorities in our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, is a testament to the bedrock dedication of our democratic leadership to the peaceful and consensual resolution of disputes.

Through our actions and initiatives, we showed the region and the world that we are an indispensable anchor of stability and security in Southeast Europe.

I give you two examples.

Firstly: it is true that bilateral relationships have been burdened by the decisions of some countries to recognize UDI. However, we worked hard to compartmentalize the negative consequences that rose to the surface as a result of differences on Kosovo's status. We opted for a non-confrontational approach. We turned to the law.

On October 8th, the General Assembly of the United Nations supported Serbia's position by an overwhelming majority. It approved a resolution to refer the question of status to the International Court of Justice.

An issue of such fundamental importance and complexity—passionately involving all at once identity, boundaries, communal rights, opposing historical narratives—has been steered clear of resorting to the force of arms for the first time in the history of our region.

Mr. Chairman,

The second example revolves around the fact that tremendous pressure was applied on the

United Nations after UDI to commence the reconfiguration of the international presence in our southern province.

Unfortunately, this process was set in motion without the approval of the Republic of Serbia—the host country of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo. And it was launched without the endorsement of the Security Council—the only institution endowed with the power to legitimate changes in the composition of the international presence in Kosovo.

This set the stage for a crisis of legitimacy.

The Republic of Serbia again led the way in showing the constructive way forward. We took it upon ourselves to build a bridge across the divide, and we succeeded.

Mr. Chairman,

I am glad that reconfiguration has been finally set aright. After months of dialogue, the United Nations and Serbia, in consultation with other stakeholders, came to an agreement on the framework of future operations in Kosovo. We also came to an understanding with the European Union on how Brussels will deepen its engagement in our southern province.

The achievement is greatly significant: it creates the conditions to protect the well-being of Serbs and other endangered communities in Kosovo. And it cements the fact that the Republic of Serbia remains indispensable to the self-governance of our southern province.

In the days and weeks to come, we expect to closely consult with the United Nations and the European Union on the implementation of the modalities and mechanisms of EULEX's status neutral deployment in Kosovo.

Mr. Chairman,

In this context, I underscore Serbia's longstanding position that the OSCE Mission in

Kosovo—or OMIK—has the potential to play an important role in a reconfigured international presence.

Through the history of OMIK, the OSCE participating States have invested great efforts and resources to instill peace, stability and security into the fabric of Kosovo's fractured and segregated society. We are all aware of the fact that this Mission's future engagement represents one of the greatest challenges for the OSCE and its participating States. That is why we have conducted ourselves in a most constructive manner with regards to recent discussions about OMIK's budget—and why I call on the participating States to support Serbia's project proposal to establish Reception Centers throughout Kosovo designed to provide assistance to non-Albanian communities in need. It would be financed from this year's OMIK budget surplus.

However, I must underline Serbia's position that the work of the largest OSCE field mission leaves much to be desired. OMIK must fundamentally reassess its methods and tactics, as I noted in detail during my September 10th address to the Permanent Council. I will not repeat myself here, yet I add that OMIK must play a more constructive role in property issues and in media-related matters, for example. And greater emphasis must be placed on OMIK fully conforming to the requirements of international law and its basic documents. OMIK must take its status-neutrality seriously. The failure of OMIK to fully implement its mandate is not an option.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

If there is one thing I would like you to take away from my remarks today, it is that Serbia is a crucial player in the regional security we all have a stake in consolidating, and a proud democracy that has weathered enormous challenges against incredible odds.

We are confident that through the continued practice of a grand-strategy of partnership and engagement, Serbia—indivisible, democratic Serbia—shall become a member of the European Union in the next few years.

With our heads held high and our sovereignty preserved, Serbia will enhance its contribution to the comprehensive pursuit of lasting peace, security and cooperation in Europe.

Thank you very much.