

**Address by Mr. Eamon Gilmore T.D., Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE,
Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to the Helsinki Commission
Wednesday 8 February 2012**

Chairman Smith, Commissioners, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you today as Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE. The Helsinki Commission has made a hugely important contribution to the work of the OSCE through the years and I wish to pay tribute to the dedication of the Commission and all the staff who have participated in these efforts. The US is a crucial player within the OSCE and I know I can rely on its support during our Chairmanship. It is, of course, always a pleasure for me to visit Washington, given the special ties which link our two countries. I would particularly like to thank Chairman Chris Smith – a long time friend of Ireland and champion of human rights in Northern Ireland and around the globe – for his kind invitation to me to join you today.

This is Ireland's first time to chair the OSCE. We view the task as a unique opportunity to make a tangible contribution to the promotion of European peace and security. In 1975, the Helsinki Final Act heralded a new vision in European security, pledging to end East-West divisions and to build a more secure Europe. I think we can all agree that much progress has been achieved toward the realisation of that vision. The cooperative and inclusive nature of the OSCE is its best asset, and it continues to play a significant role in conflict resolution and in the promotion of peace, security and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

That being said, there is no room for complacency. The need for effective multilateralism is as compelling today as it was all those decades ago, particularly now, as we face the most challenging political and economic crises of recent times. As we look towards the fortieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2015, we have an opportunity to reflect on the contribution which the OSCE can make in tackling these global challenges and in ensuring its continuing effectiveness. Our collective goal, as

agreed in Astana, is to work towards a genuine Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community, rooted in agreed principles, shared commitments and common goals.

Mr. Chairman,

I will now turn to some of the priorities of the Irish Chairmanship. We will be ambitious in progressing work across all three dimensions. And we will strive to achieve concrete results and to deliver tangible benefits, through a small and balanced package of decisions and declarations for adoption at the Dublin Ministerial Council in December.

Ireland has always attached a particular importance to the Human Dimension and we will aim to make progress in this field. Of course, the Helsinki Commission has made a hugely important contribution in this area.

The continuing threat to fundamental freedoms and human rights in a number of OSCE participating States is a cause of real concern. You have mentioned some of the issues of greatest concern. I can assure you that the Irish Chairmanship is committed to addressing specific instances where OSCE human dimension commitments are not being met, working closely with the relevant OSCE institutions. As you know, in Astana, participating States reaffirmed categorically that Human Dimension commitments are of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of States.

Our key priority in this Dimension will be internet freedom. As in other parts of the world, the threat to freedom of expression online is ever-present in the OSCE region and, regrettably, appears to be growing. Our intention is to highlight the simple fact that human rights and fundamental freedoms do not change with new technologies, but extend into the digital age. We will work to ensure that existing OSCE commitments in relation to freedom of expression, freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and other fundamental liberties apply to all forms and means through which they are exercised. As part of these efforts, we intend to organise a Human

Dimension meeting in Dublin in June, with involvement of key stake-holders, such as civil society and ICT companies. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that many Governments, including my own, are still grappling with the implications of rapid technological change. We can all benefit from an in-depth discussion of this kind.

Human Dimension meetings are also planned on a range of other topics. I believe that there will be particular interest in our proposal to focus on racism, discrimination and intolerance in sport, in view of the European Soccer Championships in Poland and Ukraine this year and the Olympic Games in London. We are all too familiar with manifestations of racism and other forms of discrimination and intolerance against sportsmen and women. The risk that younger sports fans may inherit prejudices or have them reinforced by their role models is all too evident. Nor is this problem restricted to the sports field. We should work harder to address racism, intolerance and discrimination in coaching, management and other areas in the sporting world.

Happily, sport lends itself to bringing forward good practices, and we aim to highlight some of those practices. We don't need to look far for good examples. A very good one is the work of Ambassador Dan Rooney, the US Ambassador to Ireland, who, in introducing the Rooney Rule in the NFL, [*requiring teams to interview minority candidates for head coaching and senior football operation opportunities*], helped to achieve a large increase in the number of African-American coaches.

As Chairmanship, we will also continue to prioritise the OSCE's efforts to fight intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. One of the first decisions I made in January was to appoint three Personal Representatives to deal, *inter alia*, with intolerance and discrimination against Jews, Muslims, Christians and members of other religions. I am very pleased that Rabbi Andrew Baker of the United States agreed to continue his excellent work in combating anti-Semitism, alongside Senator Akhmetov of Kazakhstan and Mrs. Justice Catherine McGuinness, a retired judge of the Irish Supreme Court.

I was also delighted to appoint a Special Representative on Gender Issues, Ms June Zeitlin. Ms Zeitlin, who currently works at the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights here in Washington DC, has been a leader on women's issues for more than thirty years with extensive public policy experience in the United States and globally. We look forward to her work in the year ahead to promote women's rights and gender equality in the OSCE region, working together with the Senior Gender Advisor in the OSCE Secretariat and the Gender Advisor in ODIHR.

Our other human dimension priorities include trafficking in human beings, freedom of association and assembly, professional and ethical standards in democratic life and freedom of religion or belief. It is my hope that early agreement can be reached on the package of meetings, so that detailed planning for the individual events can begin as soon as possible.

Ireland is also committed to taking forward, in parallel, the process of review of Human Dimension meetings, which was begun under the Lithuanian Chairmanship. We will provide a space for discussion of all proposals aimed at improving the functioning of human dimension meetings, with a view to concluding these discussions in the second half of 2012. The Chairmanship is conscious that hard choices may have to be made, and that delegations will be called upon to show flexibility and a spirit of compromise. We hope that you will put your trust in the Chairmanship.

I should like to mention just one more area of work in this dimension, as it is so crucial to the OSCE's work as a community of States committed to respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Ireland will strive to provide all necessary support to ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE in the crucial area of election observation. As has been the case to date, we hope that States holding elections in 2012 will issue timely invitations to ODIHR to organise election missions. Of course, the US itself holds elections later this year, and we trust that the US authorities will meet their OSCE commitments in this regard. We will also work to

ensure appropriate follow-up to recommendations made in election observation mission reports.

Mr. Chairman,

The confidence and security building measures adopted within the Politico-Military Dimension remain central to the enhancement of security in the OSCE region. We will call on participating States to reflect on the building blocks available to us in the areas of arms control, conflict prevention and resolution and trans-national threats. This will be the theme for the Annual Security Review Conference in June. We will also continue the good work carried out last year in updating the Vienna Document and will work with the 2012 FSC chairs in this regard. We will take forward work on tackling transnational threats such as organised crime, cyber threats, drugs, terrorism and trafficking, challenges which face all of our societies.

Mr. Chairman,

The Economic and Environmental Dimension has a particular resonance today, given the global economic and environmental challenges with which we are all confronted. Our central theme for the Economic and Environmental Forum will be the promotion of security and stability through good governance. There will be a particular focus on measures to counter corruption, money-laundering and terrorist financing. The first preparatory conference took place in Vienna earlier this week, entitled “Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism”. The next will be held in Dublin in April. We will also initiate a review of the 2003 Maastricht Strategy Document to ascertain whether it needs to be adapted to take into account evolving economic and environmental challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

Conflict resolution remains at the core of the OSCE’s mandate, a fact which was highlighted by the agreement of the conflict cycle Decision at Vilnius. We will take forward the implementation of this decision, which will assist the OSCE to deepen its

involvement in all phases of the conflict cycle and to strengthen its capacity to tackle conflict, from prevention to resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation.

As Chairperson-in-Office, I will seek to make progress towards lasting settlements of a number of conflicts in the OSCE area. I have nominated two Special Representatives, Ambassador Pádraig Murphy and Ambassador Erwan Fouéré, to assist and advise me on these issues. They are cooperating with international actors on the ground as well as maintaining close contact with the parties. The Chairmanship will seek, in particular, to promote confidence building measures and to address humanitarian needs.

As regards Moldova and Transnistria, we look forward to welcoming the participants in the “5+2” talks to Dublin later this month. We stand ready to build on the momentum created following the successful resumption of official talks at the end of last year.

Ireland strongly supports the Geneva Discussions as the best forum for facilitating engagement and providing a way forward, in relation to the situation in Georgia. The first discussions under our Chairmanship will take place next month.

We also commend the continuing work of the Minsk Group co-Chairs in addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I look forward to working closely with Ambassador Bob Bradtke and the other Co-Chairs and members of the Minsk Group throughout my term in office.

Mr. Chairman,

As you well know, we in Ireland can empathise only too well with those who are engaged in seemingly intractable conflicts. In Northern Ireland, the courage of leaders on both sides to negotiate and make compromises in the interest of peace, together with the perseverance of the Irish and British Governments, as well as international

support -in particular from the United States- has resulted in a lasting settlement. While each conflict situation is different, I believe that sharing this experience can support and encourage efforts to resolve conflicts in the OSCE region. With this in mind, I will host a conference in Dublin on 27 April which will present aspects of the Northern Ireland example as a case study. I will be joined at the Conference by the First and Deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland and I am pleased that Senator George Mitchell will also share his experience with us.

Mr. Chairman,

I will turn now to some current issues within the OSCE region. As I stated earlier, I am committed to addressing specific instances where OSCE commitments are not being met and we will work closely with all participating States to ensure that their commitments are being fulfilled.

I would like to mention briefly the situation in Belarus. The continued erosion of human rights in Belarus is a cause for concern. By prosecuting human rights defenders and limiting freedom of association, Belarus is, regrettably, falling short of its OSCE commitments. There is no doubt that a reinstatement of an OSCE presence in Belarus, in some form, would be an important step in the right direction and would send a positive signal to the international community. I will maintain an open channel to the Belarus authorities throughout our Chairmanship.

Turning to our wider neighbourhood, we can see the changes that are underway in the Southern Mediterranean. The OSCE stands ready to share its experience with democratic transitions, where sought, and through a partnership approach.

I welcome the positive Ministerial Council Decision on Mongolia's application to become a participating State and we will aim to move this forward during our Chairmanship.

As we approach 2014, the OSCE will have an increasing role to play in providing assistance to Afghanistan, building on the work achieved to date. We will work to implement the Decision on expanding the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan, through concrete projects across all three dimensions and in close co-operation with other international actors and organisations in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

As I said at the beginning, the cooperative and inclusive nature of the OSCE means that it is uniquely positioned to play a significant role in building a comprehensive security community. A busy year lies in store both for the OSCE and the Chairmanship and I will be in New York tomorrow to present our programme to the UN Security Council. I am confident that, through effective cooperation with all relevant actors, we can achieve good progress during 2012.

Thank you for your attention.