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Helsinki +40 Seminar: “Reaffirming the Strengths, Envisioning the Prospects”

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Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

Thank you for coming to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s Final Helsinki +40 Project seminar, being held under the theme “Reaffirming the Strengths, Envisioning the Prospects”. I would like to especially thank Project Chair Joao Soares, the Serbian Parliament and the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence for all that they have done to make this event a reality today.

We have an exciting programme for this two-day seminar, which includes the participation of high-ranking diplomats, parliamentarians, practitioners and academics, all gathered to continue the discussions we have held since last September. We have met in Moscow, Washington, Stockholm and Copenhagen for wide-ranging, in-depth discussions on various aspects of the OSCE’s strengths and weaknesses, with a view towards promoting reform and reaffirming the Organization’s institutional and conceptual framework in the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.

The crisis in and around Ukraine has challenged our principles and common commitments but the Helsinki Final Act should remain a solid pillar of our common security architecture. We should not see the Helsinki Accords not as something of history but as relevant today.

I can’t think of a more suitable setting to advance this discussion than here in the Serbian capital. The OSCE’s work in this country – and throughout South East Europe – has been one of our success stories. I am glad that our first panel will be devoted to the future of the OSCE’s work in the field. Thank you to Amb. Burkhard, who Heads the OSCE Mission in Serbia, for postponing his flight to Vienna to join us to share his thoughts.

The OSCE PA has always been supportive of the OSCE work in the field and has been critical when the missions were downgraded or shut down. So let us develop together a roadmap for strengthening the OSCE fieldwork in the next decade.

With the situation between Ukraine and Russia, in particular, there is a need to discuss the capabilities on the ground of the OSCE.

The other topic of our today's discussion is equally important. As Serbia is Chairing the OSCE this year – we are pleased to have the representatives of the Chairmanship to discuss with us the role of the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship in reforming the OSCE. One of the key aims of this seminar, which unites prominent politicians and think tank experts, is actually to develop ways the three key forces in society – government, parliament and the expert community can mutually strengthen each other in achieving the main objective of the OSCE – comprehensive security for all.

As we continue to work towards advancing the OSCE's vital work in all three dimensions of security, including resolving conflicts in the OSCE region, let us not forget our successes and failures, and where change is needed in order to ensure the Organization's continued relevance heading into its fifth decade.

As I have said before, a self-critical organization is a healthy one. In that spirit, I look forward to exploring the important subjects on the agenda for the next two days with you all.

I am sure the conclusions of our seminar will be taken into consideration by the governmental side of the OSCE.

Thank you again.