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“The OSCE’s role in (re)consolidating European Security ”

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Ladies and gentlemen, Parliamentarians, Distinguished guests,

Thank you all for coming. I would like to offer my particular gratitude to the Swedish Riksdag and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs for their strong commitment to this project.

This is the third event of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s Helsinki +40 Project, with the first two being held in Moscow last September and in Washington last November. Inspired by the upcoming 40th anniversary of the OSCE’s founding document – the 1975 Helsinki Final Act – this Project seeks to promote reform and reaffirm the Organization’s institutional and conceptual framework in the spirit of that landmark accord. With seminars taking place in the United States, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Serbia and Finland, the Project serves to increase awareness of the OSCE and its work, including among Members of Parliament, academia and youth.

Our project has been a great success so far, arising strong interest both among national parliaments and in the OSCE governmental structures in Vienna.

The theme of today’s seminar is “The OSCE’s role in reconsolidating European security”. With the OSCE’s agenda of the past year heavily dominated by the

crisis in and around Ukraine, naturally much of our discussion in these seminars has and will most probably focus on this conflict, and the OSCE's response to it.

The broader changes in the geopolitical landscape that the crisis has created have presented new challenges to European security which the OSCE's existing capacities may not be sufficient to fully address. One of the goals of our Helsinki +40 Project is to evaluate lessons learned over the four decades of the OSCE's existence – including its response to Ukraine crisis over the past year – in order to move from abstract ideas into concrete actions on these issues.

I would thus urge all participants today to take a step back and consider the ongoing crisis of trust and mutual understanding in Europe from the broader perspective. How can the European security architecture become resilient and immune to crisis? What are the strong points of the OSCE in countering current challenges and what distinguishes it from other international organizations? Should these strong sides be developed further and if so, how?

While there is much inspiration to be found in the fact that within the deeply polarized context of the Cold War, adversaries of the East and West were able to agree to such a wide-ranging and pioneering document as the Helsinki Final Act, it should be remembered that at the time, this accord was not exactly universally celebrated. Cold War hawks on both sides viewed it with suspicion, with Russian dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn for example calling it a “one-way détente made entirely in Moscow” and “an act of sin.”

Thankfully, history has proven these detractors wrong, which is worth keeping in mind today as compromises and concessions are sought in attempting to end the stalemate in Ukraine as well as efforts being made to avert a new Cold War on the continent.

Our discussion at the third panel today will focus on the Parliamentary Assembly's role in the future of the OSCE. The OSCE PA has been active in putting to the fore concrete proposals of OSCE reform. I consider some of them of primary importance for the future of our Organization – opening the meetings of the Permanent Council to the press and public scrutiny, greater focus on human rights-related issues, and, of course, adjustment of the consensus rule, especially on

issues related to budget and personnel. Only through these measures can the relevance and visibility of the OSCE be preserved. The participating States should not miss the chance of making this decisive step in 2015, when the Organization turns 40.

Today's seminar along with the discussions at the other seminars will form the basis of a final report to be presented this summer at the Helsinki Final Colloquium in conjunction with our 24th Annual Session. With the session being held under the theme "Recalling the Spirit of Helsinki" and taking place at Finlandia Hall where this historic document was signed, we hope to help rekindle the spirit of co-operation that has guided our work since 1975.

It is a great privilege chairing this Project, and I am delighted to see in this room such a knowledgeable group of experts, who have participated in and followed the Helsinki Process from its beginning until now, and who are deeply dedicated to it. Thank you for joining us today.