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**NATO'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
SOFIA 6-7 DECEMBER 2004.**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address this 12th OSCE Ministerial Council. I would first of all – also on behalf of the Secretary General of NATO - like to congratulate the Bulgarian Chairmanship for its energetic leadership throughout this eventful year.

NATO attaches great importance to its cooperation with the OSCE. Over the course of this year, we have stepped up that cooperation. Regular contacts have taken place at senior political level, between the Secretary General of NATO and the Chairman-in-Office and Secretary General of the OSCE. We have also had meetings at staff level, and have ensured cross-participation at conferences and seminars.

The strategic value of NATO-OSCE cooperation was once more demonstrated in Afghanistan, where our two organisations, each within its specific mandate and responsibility, contributed to the success of the recent Presidential elections. This watershed event has set Afghanistan on the road to democracy and long-term stability.

In today's fluid environment, no institution can afford to stand still. That is why NATO continues to transform its policies, strategies, and structures to be a more effective provider of security and stability.

At their recent Istanbul Summit, NATO Heads of States and Government took several key decisions that will influence the evolution of NATO for years to come. Allow me to touch upon the most important ones.

A key decision at Istanbul was to expand the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, including through several more Provincial

Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), demonstrating the Alliance's unflinching commitment to the future of Afghanistan.

Another key decision was to respond positively to a request from the Iraqi Prime Minister, and offer assistance with the training of Iraqi security forces, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1546. The implementation of this training mission is now well on track. It is an expression of the fact that a stable Iraq is in the common interest of all Allies.

With respect to the Western Balkans, at Istanbul NATO leaders agreed to conclude the Alliance's successful Stabilisation Force (SFOR) operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and welcomed the readiness of the European Union to deploy a new and distinct mission in the country. This transition was implemented just a few days ago: NATO terminated its SFOR mission and the European Union launched its Operation ALTHEA.

NATO's long-term commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina will not end, however. NATO will retain a military presence in the country, with a new headquarters in Sarajevo providing advice on defence reform, supporting the fight against terrorism, bringing indicted war criminals to justice and contributing to intelligence-sharing.

At Istanbul, NATO leaders confirmed that a robust KFOR presence remains essential to further enhance security and promote the political process in Kosovo. As the riots of last March made clear, the entire international community needs to redouble its efforts to assist in the establishment of a secure, stable and multi-ethnic Kosovo.

At Istanbul, NATO Heads of State and Government decided to enhance the contribution of its Operation Active Endeavour, which is aimed at deterring, disrupting and defending against terrorism in the Mediterranean. They agreed on an enhanced set of measures to strengthen our individual and collective contribution to the international community's fight against terrorism, including through the improvement of consultations and cooperation with Partners and other international organisations.

Let us now turn to NATO's Partnerships. At Istanbul, NATO leaders launched a new phase in NATO's Partnership policy – with more individualised cooperation, a greater emphasis on defence reform, and a stronger focus on cooperation with the Caucasus and Central Asia. A Special Representative for the two regions has been appointed. And we will soon send liaison officers to these regions as well.

NATO Heads of State and Government also reiterated their desire to further deepen their relationship with Russia. We have enhanced the quality and content of our political dialogue. We are cooperating in combating terrorism, and we have intensified our work in areas as diverse as civil emergency response and airspace management cooperation.

NATO leaders also reiterated their firm commitment to the strategic partnership with Ukraine, within the framework of the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership and the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan. It is important to recall that this relationship is based upon a commitment to shared democratic values, and upon Ukraine's own aspiration to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures.

NATO has followed recent political developments with great interest, and made clear to the Ukrainian authorities that the final result must be achieved peacefully, and with full respect for the will of the Ukrainian people and the unity of the Ukrainian nation.

At Istanbul, NATO Heads of State and Government decided to enhance NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, by increasing the opportunities for concrete cooperation on areas such as interoperability, defence reform, and combating terrorism. Our efforts will complement and mutually reinforce other Mediterranean initiatives, including those of the EU and the OSCE.

With its new "Istanbul Cooperation Initiative", NATO also made an offer of practical cooperation to interested countries in the broader Middle East region. Several Gulf states have already expressed interest and we are now working out the modalities of our future cooperation. This initiative is distinct from, but takes into account and complements, other initiatives involving other international actors.

The trafficking in human beings constitutes a flagrant abuse of human rights and fuels corruption and organised crime. That is why, earlier this year, NATO adopted a comprehensive policy to contribute to international efforts to combat it. The Alliance is determined to work together with our Partners to support international efforts, where NATO can add value, to combat this and other forms of illegal trafficking.

At Istanbul the Allies reiterated their commitment to the CFE Treaty as a cornerstone of European security and reaffirmed their attachment to the early entry into force of the Adapted CFE Treaty. Fulfilment of the remaining Istanbul commitments with regard to Georgia and Moldova will create the conditions for Allies and other State Parties to move forward on ratification of the Adapted Treaty.

So much for the decisions taken at NATO's Istanbul Summit. Later this week, NATO Foreign Ministers will meet in Brussels to review the implementation of the Istanbul decisions, to discuss recent political developments, and to examine the many important operational issues facing our Alliance.

This week the first ever ministerial meeting with our Mediterranean Partners will take place. It will be an opportunity to discuss the implementation of a more ambitious and expanded framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue as agreed at Istanbul.

Regarding Afghanistan, we will focus our discussion in particular on progress in the expansion of ISAF and next Spring's elections.

Turning to our Partners, we look forward to a frank and constructive dialogue in the NATO-Russia Council on current international security issues. Ministers will welcome the contribution of Russia to NATO's Operation Active Endeavour and will discuss with Foreign Minister Lavrov further concrete ways in which NATO and Russia might work together.

While developments in Ukraine are still not entirely clear, our Ministers will most certainly want to stress that the democratic future of Ukraine is of direct and vital interest to

NATO, and that the Alliance remains committed to assist Ukraine on the difficult path of reform.

Reaffirming our commitment on the strategic importance of Central Asia and the Caucasus, we will devote the discussion in the Euro Atlantic Partnership Council on developing closer cooperation with these regions. In that same meeting, we will also discuss the way ahead in the Balkans.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

NATO's agenda is certainly an ambitious one. It is an agenda tailored to meet the challenges of a new security environment. Moreover, in tackling these challenges, NATO is not alone. More and more, the Alliance will work in coordination and cooperation with other institutions, such as the European Union and the OSCE. Let me therefore conclude my remarks with some reflections on NATO-OSCE relations.

The tenets championed by the OSCE since its creation are today central to all efforts to building European security: promoting democracy and human rights, conflict prevention, early warning and early response to emerging crises.

NATO shares these principles and therefore we should work together, since our interests coincide and our capabilities complement each other. We have done so in the Balkans and in Afghanistan. And many NATO initiatives in areas such as arms control verification, de-mining, and disposal of ammunition, retraining of redundant military officers and other actions pertaining to defence/security reform complement efforts by the OSCE efforts. But we can and should do better. Because, more than ever, NATO-OSCE cooperation is a strategic requirement.

From NATO's point of view, the stage for closer cooperation has been set. The OSCE "Strategy to Address Threats to Stability and Security in the Twenty-First Century" also places great emphasis on cooperation between the OSCE and other international

organisations. Rightly so, as we are convinced that the need for closer cooperation is becoming more evident by the day.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Secretary General of NATO, let me wish Slovenia, and its new Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, a successful Chairmanship-in-Office.