The 14th session of the OSCE Ministerial Council:
Still addressing the visible tips of political icebergs

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Under the leadership of a proactive Belgian Chairmanship, the OSCE went through a particularly busy and rich year illustrated inter alia by the adoption of a Declaration on the strengthening of OSCE/UN relations, the admission of Montenegro as a participating State, the deployment of an environmental assessment Mission to fire-affected territories in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, and the convening of a donor conference for economic rehabilitation in the South Ossetian-Georgian region. Somewhat frantically, the year ended with the Ministerial Council and the Permanent Council holding, in parallel, at the same venue (Brussels), respectively their 14th session and 641st meeting. The Ministers made a record number of 20 formal decisions as well as 6 other texts (in the form of a ‘Declaration’, ‘Statement or just ‘Document’), and also endorsed several decisions taken by the Permanent Council at its Brussels meeting. However, because of a lack of consensus on the twin issue of the Istanbul Military Commitments and the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia, the Brussels Council was regrettably, as in previous years, rather unproductive at the political level.

Istanbul military commitments and frozen conflicts: A repeat scenario
For the fourth year in a row, the participating States did not succeed in adopting an overall political Ministerial Declaration and statements on regional conflicts. Once again, the deadlock was provoked by disagreements over the Istanbul Military Commitments and the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia.

Istanbul military commitments
The Chairmanship draft proposal on a general Ministerial Declaration included a provision recalling the linkage between the ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty and the fulfilment of the 1999 Istanbul commitments, that is to say the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova and Georgia. The text welcomed the ‘substantial progress on the ground’ stemming from the Russian-Georgian agreements of 31 March 2006 and called for completion of the withdrawal process. As regards Moldova, it acknowledged that ‘no progress could be registered in 2006’ and called on ‘the Russian Federation and parties concerned to allow the process of

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2 The OSCE Ministerial Council took place in Brussels from 4-5 December 2006.
3 However, the Belgian Chairmanship finally issued a proper ‘Chairperson’s Perception’: MC(14).JOUR/2 Annex 2 of 5 December 2006.
withdrawal of ammunition and related military personnel to resume expeditiously’. As pointed out by Vladimir Socor, the particular phrasing represented an odd contradiction with the very concept of linkage. The text referred to ‘ammunition’ under the custody of (actually a few) ‘related military personnel’, thereby discarding overall troop withdrawal. The reference to ‘parties concerned’ just expected ‘to allow’ the resumption of the withdrawal process implied that the latter depended (in line with Moscow’s standard alibi) on permission from the Transnistrian Russian-sponsored leadership. Anyhow, the text only asked for such withdrawal ‘to resume expeditiously’ with no deadline.

As Russia rejected the Belgian draft, the NATO States issued a statement reaffirming that the entry into force of the Adapted CFE Treaty could only occur once the ‘remaining’ Istanbul commitments would be fulfilled. Moscow responded with a counterstatement asserting that it has ‘honored all of the Istanbul agreements relating to the Treaty (...) without exception’. Foreign Minister Lavrov went on to blame the NATO countries for [failing] to implement the key Istanbul Commitment, i.e. the early ratification of the cfe Treaty Adaptation Agreement’ and stressed that ‘preventing entry into force of this Agreement, brings into question the viability of the Treaty itself’. Moscow’s stance made total the abstraction of its own unlawful behaviour regarding the stationing of Russian troops in Moldova against the will of the hosting State, the non-evacuation of the Georgian Gudauta base and the delivery of armaments prohibited by the CFE Treaty to the breakaway regimes of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia
On that issue, the Belgian Chairmanship tabled an amazingly innocuous text in which the participating States, ‘building upon the examples of the Donor Conference for Economic Rehabilitation in the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict

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4 MC.DD/23 of 20 November 2006 (+ Rev. 1 of 23 November and Rev. 2 of 27 November 2006): §6. However, the OSCE Voluntary Fund on Moldova remains adequate to support the completion of the withdrawal.


8 MC.DEL/21/06 of 4 December 2006.

9 Socor: ‘OSCE’s Year-End …’, op. cit. At the 3rd CFE Treaty Review Conference, the NATO States considered that the treaty-limited equipment unaccounted for and uncontrolled within the area of application was adversely affecting the operation of the Treaty (http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s060602a.htm, §§7, 9B and 11) — but Moscow refused to discuss the matter.