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**STATEMENT BY  
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FEDERAL MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE  
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, AT THE FIRST PLENARY  
SESSION OF THE TWENTY-SECOND MEETING OF THE  
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Belgrade, 3 December 2015

I began my speech to the OSCE ambassadors in Vienna in July by saying that Europe is navigating “turbulent waters” That was just over five months ago. The waters have not calmed down since then. On the contrary.

We have seen a new wave of terror since then: in Iraq, Syria, Paris, Tunisia and Libya as well as in the Sinai Peninsula. What is more, we have also experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees into Europe. The issue is the subject of intense debate among our fellow citizens. However, there are also other concerns: we have just seen the shooting down of a Russian military aircraft at the Turkish-Syrian border, an incident of relevance to this forum, for the armed forces of two OSCE States have become involved in a direct military confrontation as a result.

In eastern Ukraine, the conflict has been defused to some extent, although the ceasefire is still being violated. However, we have still a long way to go before the Minsk agreements are implemented.

Given these challenges, we really should be concerned about the state of our common security in Europe.

We have been unable to agree on any political declaration for the last 12 years in the OSCE.

We do not seem able any more to reach a consensus on how to interpret our jointly agreed principles or on the work of the institutions that we established together. What is more, our principles have been breached in an unacceptable manner. This has tended to make the divisions between us even deeper.

And every year, we struggle to provide the OSCE with resources – and we usually only manage to provide it with the same level it had in the previous year. That means *de facto* that the OSCE has less each year – even though its tasks have increased.

Dear colleagues,

The OSCE has a wide range of instruments at its disposal that could indeed help us master the various major challenges we face at present.

We see it every day in Ukraine: the OSCE has contributed greatly to every step that has led to de-escalation. At the conference with our Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation in Jordan, it was evident that other regions of the world are very much interested in the OSCE and in how it works.

Thus my appeal to you all: let us not dismantle our ship, the OSCE, in stormy waters just because it is not easy to agree on a joint course. Let us not try to build a new vessel that would be at risk of failure. Rather, our task must be to harden and strengthen our ship.

I believe that three spheres are especially important:

Firstly, crisis reaction: the OSCE should be able to react to crises sooner, more decisively and more effectively. Our experience from Ukraine and other crises can show us the way forward. We should strengthen the Secretariat, the field missions as well as the institutions of the OSCE: the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on the Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Secondly, confidence-building: the incident at the Syrian-Turkish border shows how much we need instruments to reduce military risks. This includes tools to enhance military transparency and confidence-building, which we deal with under the auspices of the OSCE. We want to modernize them so that we are better able to prevent crises in future.

Thirdly, the future of the European security order: we have to consolidate the foundations within the OSCE area. We should begin to talk again about how we want to shape our common area. For this, we need dialogue, also among ministers. The situation is too fragile for us to get bogged down for weeks in a dispute about wording.

Dear colleagues,

We do not know where we will be in a year's time. New storms can emerge at any time. It is therefore all the more important that we make the OSCE stronger. We can make quite concrete contributions towards this here in Belgrade. I can assure you that this is my main aim for Germany's OSCE Chairmanship in 2016. We have to make the public aware of the fragility of the situation, as well as the necessity of the OSCE. We want to strengthen the OSCE and its foundations in dialogue and to use it to foster our joint security, especially in these turbulent times. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your support in this endeavour.