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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1457th (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

25 January 2024

On the presentation of the priorities of the Maltese OSCE Chairmanship

Minister,

We listened with interest to Malta's priorities for its OSCE Chairmanship. Your country has inherited a very difficult legacy – unfortunately, over the past two years, the Organization's functionality has been seriously undermined by the reckless behaviour of a number of participating States, first and foremost NATO members, who have sought to turn the OSCE into a platform exclusively for political showdowns with Russia. At the end of last year, on the eve of the Ministerial Council meeting in Skopje, the OSCE's fate was literally hanging in the balance.

We note your intention to ensure the OSCE's functionality. We sincerely hope that, to back up your words, the revitalization of the Organization and the restoration of a culture of professional and dialogue-oriented co-operation will be among the Maltese Chairmanship's main priorities. A balanced agenda, strict adherence to the Rules of Procedure and consensus-based decision-making will largely determine whether we can pull the Organization back from the precipice to which it has come dangerously close. We will not be able to overcome alienation and discord without restoring mutually respectful dialogue.

By all of this, we mean in particular that the mandate of the Chairmanship-in-Office, as set out in the Porto Ministerial Council Decision of 2002, should be complied with in full and that topics with confrontational wording should not be raised for discussion at official events. We call for active consultations with the involvement of all participating States on the preparation of key events in the OSCE's annual cycle and for the programmatic work not to be skewed towards only certain issues. We recall the joint statement made by a number of participating States, including Russia, at the Ministerial Council meeting in Skopje on the crisis concerning security and co-operation in the OSCE area. It clearly outlines ways of restoring pragmatic dialogue in order to address common security problems.

Thanks to the difficult compromise reached at the Skopje Ministerial Council meeting, our Organization has begun its work in the new year with the heads of the Secretariat and the human dimension institutions having received a technical extension of nine months. We encourage the Maltese Chairmanship to make good use of this period to conduct a full-scale competition procedure to fill these four key positions.

We look forward to the prompt publication of the relevant vacancy notices, which will enable participating States to begin the candidate selection process.

The complete “Ukrainization” of the OSCE’s agenda and activities to the detriment of work in other areas is totally unacceptable.

In view of some of the remarks heard in your address today, Mr. Chairperson-in-Office, we should like to remind you of the decisions of the OSCE decision-making bodies, in particular Permanent Council Decision No. 485 of 28 June 2002, which stipulates that the OSCE’s leadership must act in public exclusively in accordance with approaches agreed upon by consensus. You have overstepped the mark in your address just now by violating that decision. This needs to be rectified.

On the whole, the current situation requires an objective perception. To make out that freedom and democracy are flourishing in Ukraine today and that civilian casualties from the use of weapons supplied there by NATO countries simply do not exist is to deceive ourselves and the international community.

The monstrous shelling of Donetsk on 21 January, the largest in terms of casualties in the entire history of the conflict in Donbas, has been completely ignored. Why, though? And what about the latest terrorist act perpetrated by the Kyiv regime yesterday, in which an Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft was shot down near Belgorod by a Ukrainian missile fired from the Kharkiv region? This aircraft was carrying 65 Ukrainian military personnel for a pre-agreed exchange – all of them, as well as the six crew members on board and the three Russian officers accompanying them, were killed. So what will it require for the OSCE leadership to take notice of these and other crimes and issue a clear reaction condemning them?

As the practice of the past two years has shown, burying one’s head in the sand, like the previous OSCE Chairmanships of North Macedonia and Poland, ignoring the obvious and deliberately glossing over the truth about the victims of the criminal actions of the Kyiv regime is a path to nowhere but the destruction of the OSCE.

The Chairmanship’s work on Ukraine should be balanced and transparent and should help to reduce confrontation rather than increase it. The current situation in Europe, and indeed in the world in general, shows that we need to learn to hear each other before it is too late. The attempts to issue *diktats* and collectively pressurize sovereign States under the guise of promoting some kind of “rules-based world order” have already proven to be flawed and futile. They have made the world less safe – and are predictably meeting growing resistance.

At the same time, we should like to point out that Russia has never shut itself off from real and effective dialogue on ways to reduce tension and avoid confrontation. With regard to Ukraine, we have always been ready for a political and diplomatic process that is based not on some unrealistic “formula” in the form of Western ultimatums to our country but on eliminating the causes of the tragic situation resulting from the coup d’état in Kyiv in February 2014. Today, such a dialogue should no doubt be aimed at ensuring that NATO countries no longer use Ukraine and Ukrainians as a weapon in their fight against Russia. Any settlement should be sustainable and rule out the possibility of reigniting the conflict with renewed vigour. So far, Russia’s stance has not been met with mutual constructive willingness on the part of its opponents. The Russian special operation will continue in full compliance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations until the existing threats are completely eliminated.

Let us state explicitly that, amidst the West’s systematic lies and double standards, Russia intends to actively defend itself against the multidimensional hybrid aggression being perpetrated by several NATO member countries, spearheaded by the United States of America and the United Kingdom, against the very

foundations of the Russian Federation's statehood and sovereignty, our country's security interests and the prospects for the favourable development of our society and State.

Minister,

We are counting on the Maltese Chairmanship to maintain the focus on other important regional issues as well, including those related to the conflict cycle. We trust that the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in the Trans-Caucasus will work regularly, without undue pauses or delays. Serious efforts by both the Chairmanship and the OSCE Mission to Moldova are needed to restore the functioning of the "5+2" format as the key to a Transdniestrian settlement. The growing tension in the Balkans requires greater attention from all OSCE structures, including the Organization's field operations in the region. With regard to the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, we support the comprehensive implementation of the agreements reached by the leaders of the two countries and Russia.

We are convinced of the need to restore the OSCE's traditionally high profile – now sadly considerably diminished – when it comes to countering the entire range of transnational threats. One of the key areas of work here must be the combating of the international terrorist threat in all its manifestations. We call upon the Chairmanship to treat the fight against drug trafficking with the utmost seriousness. We are prepared to continue looking for common ground as regards the security of information and communication technologies.

We believe it is important this year to hold the traditional high-level conferences on counter-terrorism, combating drugs, and cybersecurity, and expert meetings on border security and police co-operation. We note the need to organize the Annual Security Review Conference in accordance with the format adopted by the decision of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Porto in 2002 and to start consultations on this matter well in advance.

Concerted efforts are needed to revive the once constructive and productive work of the second "basket", which has been almost completely destroyed over the past two years by the short-sighted actions of the Chairmanships of first Poland and then North Macedonia. We expect Malta to take active steps to launch as soon as possible a fully fledged consultation process to agree on the theme, agenda and organizational modalities of the annual OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum with the participation of all participating States without exception and with due regard for their legitimate interests.

We believe it necessary to discuss the devastating consequences of the illegitimate unilateral anti-Russian restrictive measures imposed by Western countries for global production, trade, transport and logistics links and to reflect on the prospects for further economic coexistence in the OSCE area.

We call upon the Maltese Chairmanship to seriously reconsider the approach to the human dimension. There has been a severe thematic and staffing crisis in this area for the past two years. The foundations of the activities within the third "basket" are being undermined. Deliberate attempts are being made to replace the main events agreed by consensus with ersatz events featuring a discriminatory attitude towards participants from "undesirable countries". In order to remedy the situation, it is necessary, among other things, to relocate the human dimension events and headquarters of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) outside Poland, where the authorities continue to engage in persistent Russophobia.

Malta will need to take a timely and responsible approach to the agreement of an agenda for the third "basket", including a "package" of human dimension events for 2024. Efforts in this regard must take into account the views of all 57 participating States, which have legitimate and justified interests in the thematic

content of the OSCE's work. We have familiarized ourselves with the priorities presented by Malta. We welcome the intention to give consideration to the problem of trafficking in human beings and call for a focus on trafficking for sexual exploitation and the removal of human organs, tissues and cells. We must not forget such pressing issues as the rise of neo-Nazism and racial discrimination and the increasing discrimination against the Russian and Russian-speaking population. Religious intolerance and interreligious hatred are being fuelled at the instigation of the authorities of a number of countries. The linguistic and educational rights of national minorities and ethnic groups are being flagrantly violated, and freedom of movement and contacts among persons are being restricted. Spiritual and moral values and the rights of migrants and refugees, including children and women, should remain among other focal topics.

In the context of the highly topical issue of media freedom and pluralism of opinion, special attention should be paid to the inadmissibility of censorship of the media landscape, ranking of sources of information and segregation of journalists into "right" and "wrong". The realization of the fundamental right to freedom of expression is closely linked to the safety of journalists. It is categorically unacceptable to persecute, discredit, ban and encourage the physical elimination of reporters simply for their attempts to deliver information outside the mainstream.

Given the blatant bias and inconsistencies of the so-called gold standard of the ODIHR's electoral methodology, there continues to be an urgent need to develop together uniform rules for election observation in the OSCE's area of responsibility.

Against the background of the dramatic evolution of events in the Middle East, contacts with the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, which virtually ground to a halt last year, are of particular importance. We trust that Malta, situated in the very centre of the Mediterranean Sea, will give a new impetus to such co-operation with other regional organizations.

In conclusion, we should like to recall that the OSCE represents a unique comprehensive platform for co-operation among the States of the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region, the purpose of which in the current circumstances is to prevent the uncontrolled escalation of confrontation, which risks the complete destruction of all the safeguards standing between our countries and the chaos of war. That makes the responsibility of those at the helm of our Organization all the greater. We should like to wish the entire Maltese Chairmanship team every success in this extremely difficult endeavour.

I should like to conclude with a wise quote from former French President François Mitterrand at the watershed CSCE Summit back in 1994. "The CSCE was the narrow but safest bridge that prevented the parties involved in the Cold War from descending into a hot war."

Thank you for your attention.